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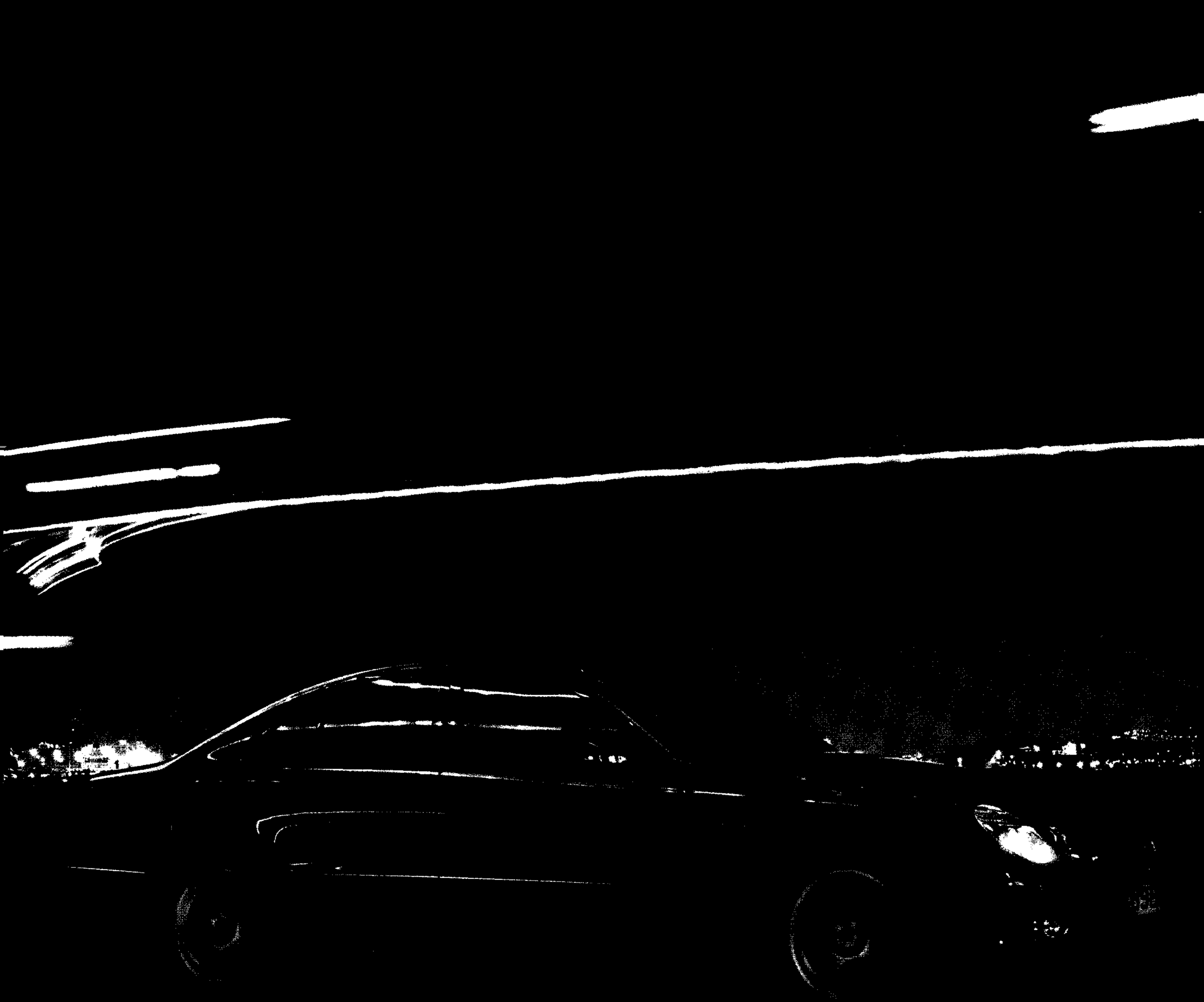

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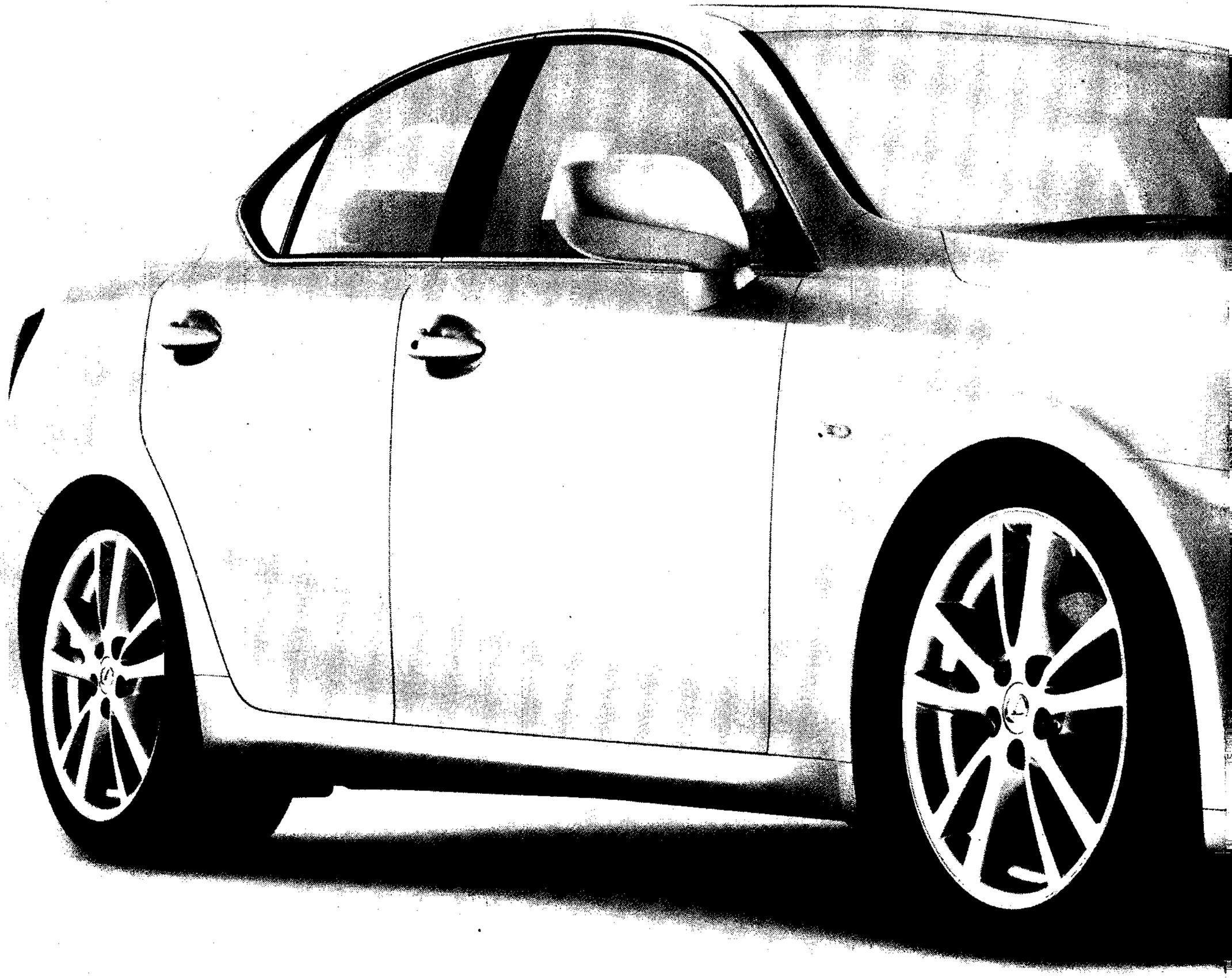

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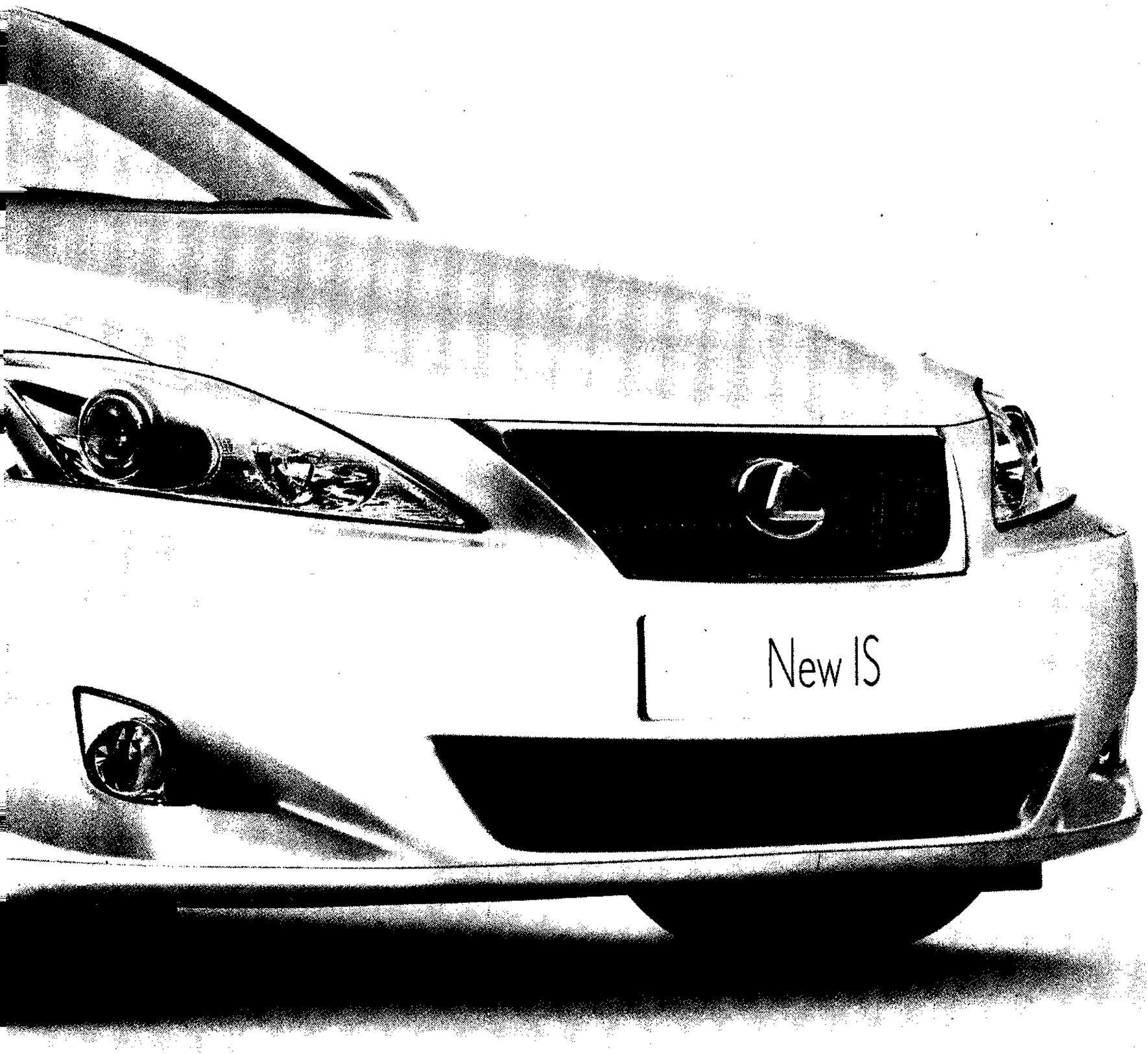

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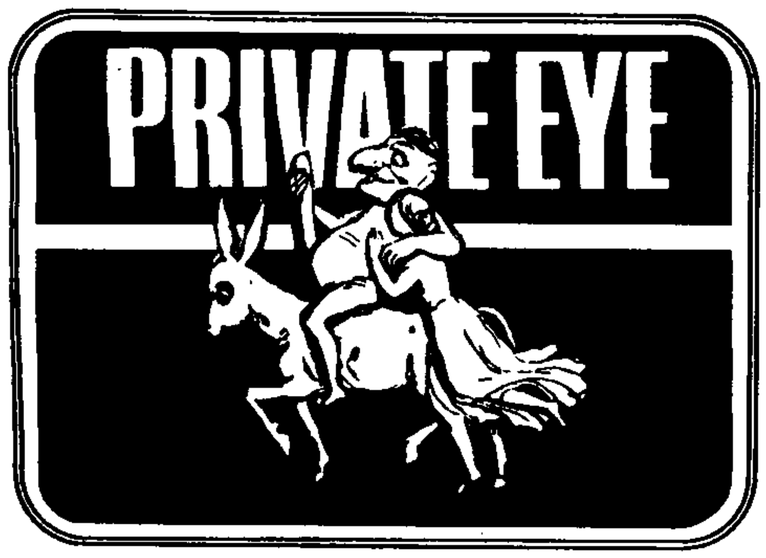

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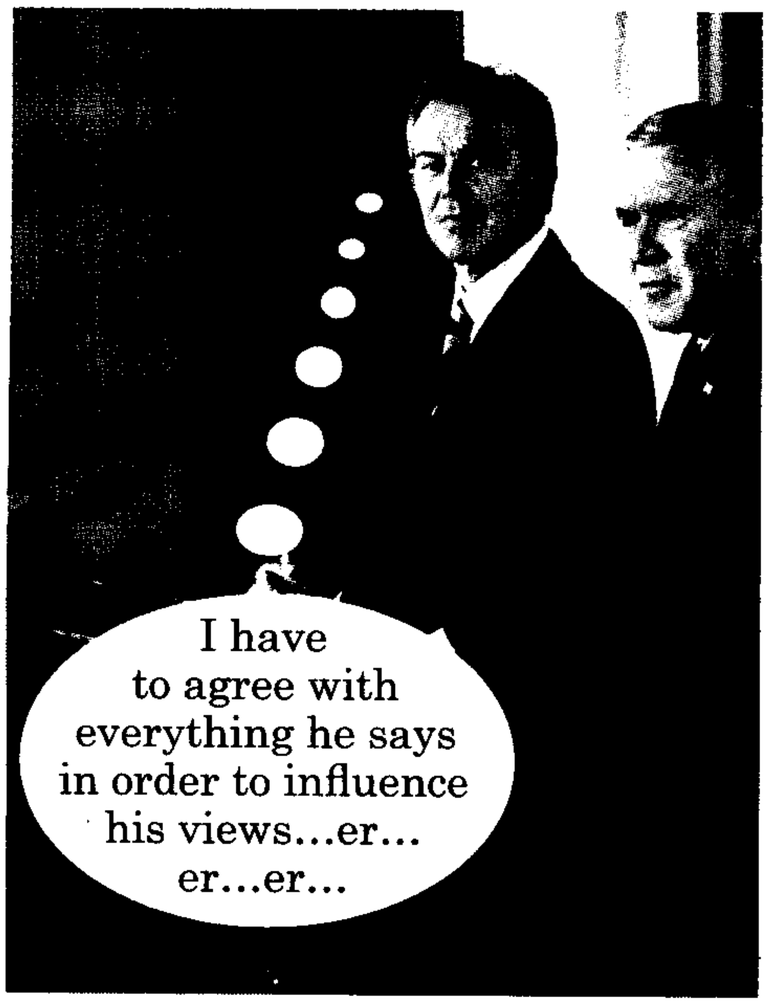

LEST Tony Blair be in any doubt as to the importance attached to him by George W. Bush's administration, this is a copy of the president's full itinerary for 28 July, as issued to the White House press corps last week:

"WHITE HOUSE SCHEDULE

Friday, July 28, 2006

- President Bush meets with & holds a joint press conference with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair.
- President Bush participates in a Photo Opportunity with the Top 10 American Idol Finalists.
- President Bush participates in a Photo Opportunity with the 2006 Boys and Girls Nation [a national youth debating championship] Delegates."

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ABC

TWO words conspicuously absent from Work and Pensions Secretary John Hutton's lengthy statement on the closure of the Child Support Agency were "computers" and "EDS".

Several investigations have put a botched £450m IT system, introduced (late) in 2003 by the *Eye's* favourite firm, at the heart of the thousands of cock-ups and immense backlogs that Hutton lamented.

Two years ago Hutton's predecessor Alan Johnson had pinned the blame firmly on EDS, telling a committee of MPs that the company's own review had judged the IT system "badly designed, badly delivered, badly tested and badly implemented".

So why no mention now of EDS's contribution to one of New Labour's biggest public service foul-ups? Could it be because the contract signed with the firm in 2000 runs for ten years, guaranteeing its involvement on the CSA's legacy of cases and quite possibly for whatever organisation succeeds the doomed body?

So much for the "fresh start" Hutton promises.

ISOFT, the main software provider on the £12.4bn NHS IT programme, has announced that not only has it written off £165m of revenue (see *Eye* 1161) – it also suspects "irregularities" in its past accounting which may have caused the company to report income it hadn't received. It has appointed its new auditor, Deloitte, to investigate.

Many of the directors from the period involved have resigned (hugely enriched, of course) but may now be feeling a bit nervous. Among them is Sir Digby Jones, chairman of the audit committee that should have been looking out for this sort of thing at the time. Since resigning from Isoft last year, Sir Digby has found a lucrative position as senior adviser to the chief executive of a certain large accountancy firm... Deloitte!

THANKS to tenacious Public Accounts Committee member and Tory MP Richard Bacon (the man who spotted failures to deport foreign criminals), some light has been shed on how accountants make millions from companies on their knees.

Back in March the committee examining the MG Rover collapse heard that administrators PricewaterhouseCoopers seemed to have received £1.2m for a week's work (it eventually earned several times that). What, Bacon wanted to know, were its rates?

This month's PAC report gave the answers: PwC partners charged their time at £425 per hour, or £3,400 for an eight-hour day, while managers and senior managers (beancounters with a few years' experience) were charged out at between £247 and £320 an hour. Administrators, ie clerks, were hired out at around £180 per hour. (KPMG's rates, given for comparison, were even higher).

PS: Around 1,400 sacked MG Rover workers haven't found jobs yet, and many of those who have are earning a pittance. PwC's fees meanwhile add to the £500m hole in their pension fund and what other creditors will lose.

NO ONE at the Home Office seems particularly worried by the huge number of job cuts proposed by Home Secretary John Reid as part of his strategy to make the department "fit for purpose".

The numbers at headquarters alone are to be reduced from 8,000 to 5,900, but staff will merely be moving chairs. By making the immigration service an "agency", as the "Bruiser" proposes, he will immediately appear to have rid himself of 2,000 jobs.

But is this going to improve matters? It now emerges that one of the reasons for the foreign prisoner fiasco which finished off Reid's predecessor, Charles Clarke, was that in order to avoid a crisis in the immigration courts (where cases were stacking up by the thousands), hundreds of staff were transferred from the immigration/ deportation section to start processing asylum appeals and reduce the backlog.

This meant that there were suddenly not enough staff to process applications for deportation quickly enough and – hey presto – inmates were being let out of jail and disappearing before they could be deported.

So how has the Home Office dealt with the problem? Some 300 staff have been moved from appeal to deal with the foreigners in jail facing deportation. And guess what? Judges in the immigration courts are again complaining about delay and adjournments as cases aren't ready.

WHEN John Prescott rides off into the sunset, spurs a-jingling, what will become of his devoted "little helper", Health Minister Rosie Winterton?

Rosie's advancement at Westminster has depended entirely on Prescott's patronage. She was even appointed a privy counsellor recently, an honour normally reserved for rather more senior or experienced ministers. But there will be no more baubles when Prezza leaves.

Luckily Rosie is on good terms with her old political-lobbying pals at Connect Public Affairs, where she was managing director in the 1990s before entering parliament. A current director at Connect, Andy Sawford, previously worked as Rosie's parliamentary and political adviser. The firm's clients include her local council, Doncaster, as well as the office of the deputy prime minister.

Interestingly, Rosie graced the recent annual staff dinner at Connect with her presence. Is she already preparing to make the leap (once Prezza goes) from the festering frontbench to the altogether more clean, wholesome and lucrative world of corporate lobbying?

---

100 Years Ago

"An allegation of bribery for purposes of buying a peerage is destructive of the body politics [*sic*] of this country." – Robert Maxwell, explaining to the high court why he sued *Private Eye* over its suggestion that he might have given money to Labour in the hope of a title, November 1986.

THE leaked memo revealing how Lord Falconer intends to deter researchers and members of the public from asking the government awkward questions under freedom of information laws will come as no surprise to anyone who has studied how Labour's flagship legislation works in practice.

Which government department, for example, has the worst record of delay and non-compliance in its dealings with the office of the Information Commissioner, the watchdog which is supposed to regulate the workings of the FoI Act?

Why, it's Falconer's own Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA), of course – the very department charged with implementing the new laws. No wonder the Constitutional Affairs Secretary now wants to introduce a flat-rate fee which could have a "deterrent effect" and "inhibit serial requesters".

The failures of Falconer's own department were discovered by BBC radio producer Martin Rosenbaum when he put in an FoI request to the commissioner asking for a list of the worst offenders among public bodies for failing to provide the information he needs to conduct his investigations. Among 25 examples of excessive delay by central government departments, the DCA and Foreign and Commonwealth Office were the most frequent offenders.

BACK in February, Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart told the House of Commons that the latest "Measuring the Quality of Prison Life" survey results of all the UK's prisons were in, and "may be obtained from the Home Office Open Government Unit".

Naturally, prison rights campaigners at the Howard League for Penal Reform asked the unit for the results. In April came a reply saying it was considering it. And in May the unit wrote again to say it was "in the process of considering the exemptions". July the brought a letter saying: "We regret that there will be a further delay". So much for open government.

THE cross-party Public Administration Select Committee has added its verdict to that of the parliamentary ombudsman on the government's handling of occupational pension funds, which left 85,000 people high and dry when their employers went bust (see *Eyes passim*).

It too found the government's conduct was "clearly maladministration" and demanded compensation for the victims, pointing out that to reject the ombudsman's findings "would raise fundamental constitutional issues about the position of the ombudsman and the relationship between parliament and the executive." Yet still the government refuses either to apologise or to cough up.

Strangely the woes of 85,000 people robbed of their pensions is one domestic policy issue the next prime minister doesn't want to take over. Pressed recently by a select committee on the costs of compensating the victims, he refused point blank to answer a single question on the subject.

IN THE run-up to the extradition of the NatWest 3, aka the Enron 3, Home Office Minister Baroness Scotland was bombarded with oral questions from disgruntled peers. A Whitehall source has now given Lord Gnome the briefing document telling her what she should say – and what she should keep quiet about.

If asked what discussions had taken place with the US authorities about bail, she could refer vaguely to "continuing discussions" between the British attorney-general and his American counterpart but refuse to comment further. In particular, the anonymous official advised Lady Scotland, she "should *not* disclose that US AG said prosecutors would not oppose bail".

What if peers asked about "liaison" between the UK and US prosecutors? "Better to stay away from this if possible," the briefer warned. It would seem odd if Scotland implied that there were no liaison in a trans-national case, but equally "if we draw attention to liaison arrangements it may suggest that the decision to extradite to the US was a stitch-up from the start". Fancy!

KNACKERWATCH

The Lawrence Case Revisited

STEPHEN Lawrence's murder returned to the front pages last week following allegations in a BBC documentary from former detective Neil Putnam.

He claimed that an officer involved in the investigation, Det Sgt John Davidson, received money from the south London criminal Clifford Norris, whose son David was one of the murder suspects.

Shock horror – but not all that new. Putnam's specific accusations against Davidson were first revealed by *Guardian* hack Vikram Dodd in a story published on 30 April 2002. Then as now, Davidson denied them.

Davidson's embarrassing problem, however, is that in denying any collusion with Norris he has to portray himself as a blundering half-wit. If he's not a knave, he must be a fool.

These are the only possible alternative explanations for his behaviour in the aftermath of Stephen Lawrence's murder. On 23 April 1993, the day after Stephen was stabbed to death, a young white skinhead nicknamed "James Grant" walked into Eltham police station and named three of the murderers as David Norris and Jamie and Neil Acourt. He also gave details of previous vicious attacks carried out by Norris, the Acourts and their gang, who modelled themselves on the Kray twins.

There was no attempt to interview Grant for the next 24 hours. He was simply sent away and told to keep in touch. A day later Det Sgt Davidson – a detective with 25 years' experience – interviewed Grant. They had several meetings at which more vital information was disclosed. But, as we reported back in July 1998 (*Eye* 954), all the notes mysteriously disappeared.

Davidson told the Macpherson inquiry that he wrote the information down on a docket. "The docket went missing… I don't know where it went." He went on to say that he couldn't remember if he had even bothered to speak to another potentially crucial witness, known as Witness K, who had visited the Acourts' house on the night of the murder.

Davidson also claimed that "James Grant" hadn't divulged the source of his information. But Grant insisted to Kent police, who investigated the original handling of the murder inquiry, that he did give Davidson the name of his source – who was never interviewed. As Michael Mansfield put it to Davidson during the Macpherson hearings: "You really did not want this informant's material to be followed up." Davidson replied: "I don't like your suggestion, sir."

Nor did Sir William Macpherson. His report firmly rejected any suggestion of "corruption" or "collusion". Surveying the incredible catalogue of police errors and omissions, which meant that the murderers remained unpunished, he attributed them all to institutional racism and incompetence.

"And here is the central contradiction," Paul Foot noted in his epic deconstruction of the Macpherson report (*Eye* 971). "On the incompetence and racialism of the Metropolitan police, especially in the lower ranks, the inquiry was uncompromising… The charges of 'corruption' and 'collusion', however, were treated in a totally different manner."

On corruption and collusion, Macpherson maintained that "the standard of proof must be the criminal standard… we can only reach a conclusion adverse to the police or individual officers if we are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt." Yet in other areas of the case "we are entitled to reach conclusions based upon a balance of probability." As Paul Foot concluded: "This distinction, blandly asserted without authority or even argument (is it really more permissible to call a man a bungling racist than to call him corrupt?) set the whole course of the inquiry."

A wall was thus set up between information about police uselessness or racism (fair game) and collusion or corruption (confidential). When information came to light about highly suspicious meetings in a Chislehurst pub between Clifford Norris and another detective, Macpherson insisted that the officer be referred to only as "XX".

He was in fact Det Con David Coles, who was assigned to guard Duwayne Brooks, the main witness to the Lawrence murder, during the Old Bailey trial of three of the suspects – despite his associations with the gangster father of one suspect. Coles never faced a disciplinary hearing about his meetings with Norris. He retired on a full police pension in February 2000, having been on "sick leave" since 1998.

More than 13 years after Stephen Lawrence's death, the Met's reaction to last week's stories suggests that although willing to accept accusations of racism and incompetence, on questions of collusion and corruption it still doesn't give an XX.

"WE ALL have an interest in Israel remaining secure," pronounced Malcolm Rifkind, MP for Kensington and Chelsea, on *Newsnight* where he'd been invited to discuss the Israeli action in the Lebanon.

Rifkind's personal interest is not only political. As non-executive chairman of the security company ArmorGroup International and with substantial share options in the business, Rifkind stands to trouser the benefits of a multi-million pound contract won by ArmorGroup to defuse mines and unexploded ordnance dumped all over Lebanon by, among others… the Israelis.

JUST FANCY THAT!

BRITAIN's biggest polluter was identified in last week's Environment Agency report: Thames Water, with 31 "pollution incidents" in a year and the highest level of fines at £128,000.

For a couple of years penalty notices have been winging their way to the company's plush new headquarters overlooking the river in Reading. Its name? "Clearwater Court".

HISTORIC AGREEMENT 2

Street Of Shame

WHEN the latest Middle East war kicked off, *Daily Express* editor Peter "Mentally" Hill immediately recognised the gravity of the situation and dispatched a reporter and photographer to Beirut, ordering production staff to clear five pages for on-the-spot coverage.

As his hacks were landing in Beirut, however, Hill's BlackBerry received a message from the office of Richard "Dirty" Desmond… and coverage was suddenly reduced to a page, with Hill asking his executives whatever had possessed them to fill the paper with boring rubbish about the Lebanon. Over on the *Daily Star*, meanwhile, Dirty Des was busy changing a page 2 headline to something more in line with his take on the subject: "Israel Has World Support".

So how would Desmond deal with last weekend's massacre at Cana? On Monday, while every other front page was dominated by reports from Beirut, the *Express* splashed on a story about… dentistry. (Which, to be fair, made a refreshing change from the usual Diana drivel.) The attack on Cana wasn't mentioned at all until page 6 – and then hastily set in context with an op-ed piece headed: "How Straw and Beckett's condemnation of Israel is shameful self-interest."

Whether Israel still enjoyed "world support" for its action was not, however, divulged.

SINCE *Telegraph* chairman Aidan Barclay has a horror of seeing his name in the papers, surprise was expressed in early July when he signed an open letter to the Home Secretary – published in the *Telegraph* – protesting at the extradition of the so-called NatWest Three.

As Stephen Glover wrote in the *Independent* at the time, perhaps Barclay was partly motivated by "the genuine fear that if the NatWest Three can be whisked off to America… the same thing could happen to any of us. We could all of us have our collars fingered by an over-zealous American prosecutor."

Prescient words. Following the recent arrest of BetonSports chief executive David Carruthers, bosses of online gaming companies are now urgently considering whether they dare set foot on American soil, as the US justice department warns that it regards all internet gambling as illegal. British businessmen who could be affected include the owners of Ritz Casino Online – aka Aidan Barclay, plus his father and his uncle.

At the *Independent*, too, the American crackdown is being monitored attentively. Tony O'Reilly's Independent News and Media, which publishes the high-minded *Indie*, is also co-owner of the rather less high-minded Cashcade Ltd, a web-based gaming company which achieved a turnover of $100m last year through "services ranging from casino to bingo and poker". No doubt O'Reilly will bear this in mind before planning his next trip to the States.

A BAFFLING item in the *Daily Star*'s "Hush Hush" column asks "Which MP can't see himself getting to Number 10 unless he keeps quiet about his glass eye? He fears votes will be put off if they discover he has a synthetic ball in his socket. But several backbenchers have found out, so its only a matter of time before it gets out. Watch this space…"

Er… would it by any chance be Gordon Brown, who famously suffered a detached retina in a teenage rugby accident in 1967, and has talked about the incident in innumerable interviews and several biographies ever since?

LAST WEEK's verdict in the "red mercury" trial at the Old Bailey is a grave embarrassment for the *News of the Screws* and its fake sheikh Mazher Mahmood, who was the main prosecution witness. But it could have been worse.

Since hacks deserted the trial as soon as Mahmood finished giving his evidence, the testimony of the next witness – his cousin and assistant, Mahmood Qureshi – went unreported.

Like Maz, Qureshi seems reluctant to show his face in public. Throughout his stint in the box he wore a blue hoodie over his head, depriving spectators of the chance to admire the gold teeth which have earned him the nickname "Jaws".

The three defendants were accused of trying to procure "red mercury", which could supposedly be used for terrorist purposes. "Whether red mercury does or does not exist is irrelevant," the prosecution claimed. The important point was that the three men allegedly sought to buy some at a meeting with two mysterious characters who later turned out to be Maz and Jaws, working undercover for the *News of the Screws*.

Was it true, defence counsel asked Qureshi, that in his first statement to police he said there were two recordings of the meeting? Yes. And in his second, just the one? Yes. Why? He had been honestly mistaken.

Was it also true that he had 34 convictions for offences of dishonesty or theft, up to 1999? From somewhere inside his hoodie, the fake sheikh's right-hand man conceded that the answer, once again, was yes.

"COCAINE, ORGIES AND ME" was the headline the *Daily Star* chose for an front-page set of revelations by former *Big Brother* winner Kate Lawler that she had neither taken cocaine nor participated in orgies.

"It saddens us to publish these pictures which bury her golden-girl image," tutted the paper over what it termed her "crazed obscene romps in nightclub kinky sex pic shame". "But we hope they might act as a wake-up call to her, and bring our Kate back from the road to self-destruction."

And hopefully the pictures – which showed nothing much more shameful than the 26-year old fooling around with some friends in a nightclub and sucking chocolate spread from her own finger – did just that, when they were published in *Heat* and a number of other celebrity magazines nearly a week before the *Star*'s shocking "exclusive".

THE *Daily Mail* was delighted with its Wayne Rooney "exclusive" last week, which revealed that the spud-faced nipper had fallen out with his former Everton manager David Moyes.

Not very exclusive, actually – simply a cut-and-paste job from Rooney's autobiography which the publishers had just made available to all newspapers. But there was a far better story that the *Mail* could have lifted from the book. On page 211 of *My Story So Far*, Rooney refers to a national newspaper which "maintained that, at Coleen's 20th birthday party in April 2006, our two families, the Rooneys and the McLoughlins, had had to be kept apart in separate rooms in case they all started fighting. The paper had referred back to the party where supposedly our two families had got embroiled in a punch-up and the police had had to be called – which, as I've said, wasn't true. On this latest occasion, there was actual proof, which we could show quickly, that the story was untrue – because my family was not even at the party."

The paper which published this rubbish and then had to issue an immediate retraction was, of course, the *Daily Mail*.

Sir Menzies told BBC News 24 he had wanted to be Lib Dem "for quite a long time".

His first challenge as party leader will be to rally activists at the party's spring conference in Harrogate at the weakened.

BBC News website

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Well-off Children 'More At Risk Of Cancer': Youngsters in affluent areas are more likely to develop leukaemia and other childhood cancers, scientists said yesterday. In the largest study of its kind, experts found that those from well-off families have a greater chance of developing diseases such as cancer of the blood, bone and organ tumours." – *Daily Mail, 20 July, page 1*

"Low Social Status Can Take Years Off Your Life: Having a low social status can make you age more quickly, research suggests… It is thought the discovery could explain why people from more deprived backgrounds suffer worse health than those who are better off." – *Daily Mail, 20 July, page 5*

ON THE morning after Arsenal's recent testimonial match for Dennis Bergkamp at the new Emirates stadium, the *Sunday Express* and *Daily Star Sunday* both had photos of "young Arsenal fan Charlie Harris" meeting Thierry Henry.

A day later, the *Daily Express* showed Charlie with Bergkamp himself while *Daily Star* readers were treated to a huge photo captioned "Top guns: Patrick Vieira and young Arsenal fan Charlie Harris enjoy the great day".

Why did a mere mascot merit such prominent coverage? And why was it only Richard Desmond's papers that paid him any attention?

Charlie happens to be the grandson of Desmond's close friend Lord Harris of Peckham, owner and chairman of CarpetRight, whose ads for cheap rugs – "60% OFF! OFFER MUST CLOSE TOMORROW!" – often adorn the *Express* and *Star*. All Dirty Des's editors were duly ordered to carry the lad's photo. Anyone disobeying would, of course, have been carpeted.

IT SEEMS the cash-strapped *Independent* isn't such a shoestring operation after all.

City editor Jeremy Warner, who has been at the *Indy* since its launch, was recently offered the chance to jump ship and join the *FT*'s Lombard column. Determined to stop him going, editor Simon Kelner immediately made Warner an offer he couldn't refuse by doubling his salary to £210,000 – or about £1 for every reader.

O·B·N

On the evidence of this book, however, one thing is certain: anybody wanting to know what has happened, or is going to happen, should read Private Eye, because that satirical publication, born in "the swinging Sixties", was the only one, over and over again, to get things right.

PEREGRINE WORSTHORNE
Review of White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties by Dominic Sandbrook, Evening Standard.

Submitted by Renée Ware

READERS of the Scottish *Daily Record* were treated to a corking scoop last Tuesday – an exclusive interview with the young Glaswegian call-centre worker who for two years passed himself off as "Captain Sir Alan McIlwraith" until the deceit was exposed this spring.

"BOGUS WAR HERO SPEAKS FOR THE FIRST TIME ABOUT HIS LIES," the paper boasted.

Alas, the scoop was as bogus as Sir Alan McIlwraith himself. This latter-day Walter McMitty had indeed spoken for the first time – but to Audrey Gillan of the *Guardian*. After spotting the *Grauniad*'s first edition, the *Record* news editor hastily cleared a page and ran the interview under the byline of *Record* hack Lachlan MacKinnon, forgetting to mention that every word had been stolen from another newspaper.

PAPARAZZI UPDATE

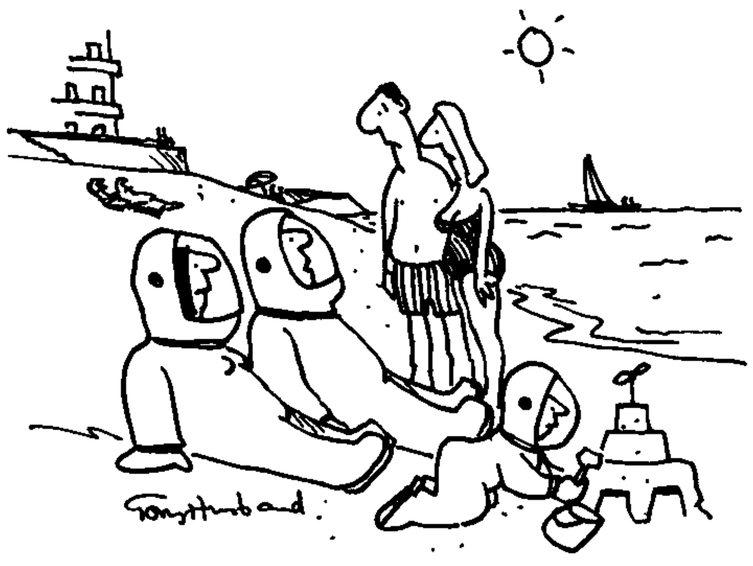
AS THE ninth anniversary of the tabloids renouncing all paparazzi pictures in the wake of Princess Diana's death approaches, it is good to see that they are only breaking their promises when it is justified by a really vital news story.

So last week we learned that many celebrities like to wear swimming costumes when they are swimming (David Beckham, Sarah Harding, Madonna, Penelope Cruz, Gisele Bundchen and Frank Lampard in the *Mail, Sun, Mirror, Express* and *Star)*; when not on the beach, they tend to choose clothing appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions (Sienna Miller in the *Sun* and *Mirror*; the Countess of Wessex and Princess Louise in the *Sun* and *Mail*). When on honeymoon they tend to be accompanied by their wives (Ant and Lisa McPartlin, *People*); on holidays many take their children along as well (Thierry Henry in the *Sun*; John Terry in the *Star*). Couples sometimes kiss one another (Prince Harry and Chelsy Davy, *Mail, Mirror, Sun*; Cameron Diaz and Justin Timberlake, *Mirror, Star;* Nadine Coyle and Jesse Metcalfe, *People, News of the World*), while those who are single sometimes talk to members of the opposite sex (Jenson Button, *Mirror, Express, Star* and *Sun;* Jason Statham, Craig David, *Star)*.

Eating ice-cream is a popular seaside activity for some celebrities (Nancy Dell'Olio, *Sun;* Kerry Katona, *News of the World*). Sometimes they walk down the streets in which they live (Charlotte Church, *Mail*; Eva Longoria, *Star*) or streets near where they are staying on holiday (Posh and Becks, *Sun*); some have been known to visit shops (Prince Harry, *Mail*; Chelsy Davy, *Star*).

Some female celebrities may be pregnant, or possibly have just recently eaten (Halle Berry, Nicole Kidman, *Mirror, Express, Star*). And once they reach their 50s and 60s, celebrities tend to have less impressive physiques than they did when they were in their 20s (Jack Nicholson, Twiggy, *Mail*; Cheryl Ladd, *Sunday Mirror*).

The Pope's religious affiliation is as yet unknown, but as soon as long-lens photographic evidence emerges, readers will be the first to know...



"There's no way we're going to get skin cancer"

POLLYWATCH

THE Polly Fillerish witterings of newspaper columnist and TV airhead Lowri Turner about her domestic trials and tribulations become ever more fantastical.

In the *Daily Mail* on 6 July, she contrasted her new spouse with his predecessor, former *Sunday Mirror* editor Paul Connew. "Without wishing to be rude to my first husband, the father of my children, I will say that my choice of husband number two was informed by my experience of being married to the first, an archetypal Alpha Male." She implied that Connew's "career-obsessed" attitude was to blame for their break-up.

Whoops! The truth is that Connew gave up work to become a house-husband and primary carer for their oldest son, at her request, so she could pursue her media ambitions. She then abruptly ditched him while pregnant with child number two, complaining that she was no longer satisfied with being the breadwinner.

Turner's self-portrait is equally surreal. In newspaper articles and TV appearances on *The Wright Stuff* she presents herself as a harassed supermum who can relate to hard-up mums on council estates struggling to make ends meet. What would those mums make of her revelation on 13 July, also in the *Mail*, that she used to employ "a cleaner, a nanny, a PA, a gardener, a personal trainer, a yoga teacher and a nutritionist"?

Four years ago she decided to ditch most of these key personnel, starting with the cleaner. ("She was a lovely woman from Colombia, but her motivation was, shall we say, lacking.") Then the nanny went. Although Lowri's life became "a bit less glamorous", it meant she spent more time with her children and even started doing the school run – or so she claims.

Conspicuous by its absence, as usual, was any reference to the fact that her two sons actually spend most of their time living with Connew, the man she libels so regularly and profitably. Why does *Mail* editor Paul Dacre let her get away with it?

"SORRY, but my children bore me to death!" claimed Helen Kirwan-Taylor in what the *Daily Mail* called "a provocative cri de coeur that will enrage thousands of women" last week.

"While all my girlfriends were dropping important careers, I was begging the nanny to stay on, at least until she had read my two a bedtime story… I spent much of the early years of my children's lives in a workaholic frenzy because the thought of spending time with them was more stressful than any journalistic assignment I could imagine."

It was then, presumably another Helen Kirwan-Taylor (one who also mysteriously had children called Constantin and Ivan) who penned a lengthy piece for the *Evening Standard* in October last year giving her tips for raising well-adjusted offspring: "I can never get over how celebs talk about discipline when you know they have two full-time nannies, and the mother is never at home anyway. The more time you spend with your children, the better they behave. As soon as I got rid of my last nanny, my boys practically started to purr."

So tedious does she find her children that she has written a mere 46 articles about them and their various nannies for the national press in the past six years.

O·B·N

"We are paying tribute to a genre of protean newspaper writer who has long since passed from the scene... Which other journalist writes with such informed enthusiasm on cars and dogs, history and opera? You are versatility incarnate, like the actor renowned for both his Malvolio and King Lear, the opening batsman who is also a lethal spinner.".

NICHOLAS DE JONGH on Brian Sewell, Evening Standard

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

FOR some years the Department for Education has been working on how it can scrap Northern Ireland's "11-plus" Transfer Test.

While pushing the mantra of parental choice elsewhere, the government wants Northern Ireland to move to a set of strict criteria based on whether a child has any siblings at a school, how far away they live and which primary school they attended. Education ministers have said that if it's still unclear which secondary school a child should attend, placement would be done by "random selection".

Opinion polls have shown that up to 90 percent of people in Northern Ireland are against these plans. Debating the merits of selection is, however, a futile activity in the province as the decision has been made in Westminster. A Commons standing committee and the House of Lords enacted an order in council under royal prerogative last month, and unless the devolved executive is restored by November it will come into force. Indeed, opponents of the move, including Conservative Northern Ireland spokesman Lord Glentoran, claim that the scrapping of the test is being used as a pawn to blackmail the parties back to Stormont so they can cancel the decision.

So much for parental choice then. Or, indeed, democracy.

THE idea that the government's City Academies are an unaccountable law unto themselves gained further credence before parliament broke up when Education Minister Jim Knight confirmed that the flagship schools aren't subject to the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act and wouldn't commit to bringing them within it.

So while academies can set their own ethos, admissions policies, curriculum, pay and conditions and a host of other rules under a governing body appointed by a wealthy sponsor, if a parent or anybody else wants to find out what's going on they will have to rely on the candour of those in charge – often rich businessmen not keen on awkward questions.

The policy represents joined-up government at its finest. In his first annual report on the FoI Act, Lord Chancellor Charlie Falconer recently boasted: "In many cases this means new information, never previously released, is in the public domain, such as details of local school performance…" Unless it's information on the government's favoured type of secondary school, that is.

"…Rich man, poor man, beggarman, person in need of a hug…"

LATEST APPOINTMENTS

HOW effective will the Audit Commission be under its new chairman, Michael O'Higgins?

The commission is responsible for ensuring that public money in England is used "economically, efficiently and effectively", especially in the NHS and local government; so a prime objective of this independent body should perhaps be to examine the vast increase in cash given to management consultants by the health service and local councils.

But O'Higgins is very much a poacher turned gamekeeper whose last employer did very well out of this largesse. He comes to the commission fresh from PA Consulting where he was the managing partner.

Ruth Kelly, who took over many of John Prescott's departmental responsibilities in May, said on his appointment that O'Higgins would "bring a wealth of experience and expertise to this challenging role" – but much of that experience included boosting the private finance initiative.

The Audit Commission has in the past been critical of government PFI schemes (like its report into schools schemes). But as O'Higgins told *Management Consultancy* magazine, PFI and public-private partnerships were "key drivers for PA's public sector business".

O'Higgins was "Head of Government and Public Service" at the management consultancy, and under him PA Consulting earned big bucks advising the government on various schemes. Not all the advice it gave was terribly helpful, however. PA Consulting earned £12.5m advising on one of the worst, the London Underground PPP. Just the man to do the auditing!

TRANSPORT Minister Douglas Alexander has appointed a new "commercial adviser" who previously made his living working for a firm that earns millions from PFI contracts with... the Department of Transport.

Andy Friend took up his post at that end of July. Since 1999, Friend he has been a senior suit with John Laing plc, most recently its chief executive. The company of course used to build houses, but it became so entranced by the cash to be made from government PFIs, it sold its old-fashioned bricklaying business and became "the only UK FTSE-listed company whose core business is focused entirely upon the development of PFI/PPP projects and operations".

Laing has extensive PFI work building roads, like parts of the M6 and M40. The Welsh Assembly will also be paying it for the A5 on Anglesey for 30 years, with a "shadow toll" based on the number of cars that use the road also going to Laing.

Members of the Welsh Assembly were furious to learn that nearly half the £100m cost of the road had already been paid in the first three years. At this rate Laing would be in pure profit for 23 years of the contract.

Laing is involved in other contracts too, like the notorious Norfolk & Norwich hospital PFI, which was a big boost to its business but somewhat less helpful to the health service (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

A CLUE as to what a Brown government will look like has emerged with the chancellor's appointment of a senior "transformational government" adviser: current HM Revenue and Customs chairman Sir David Varney.

But how will Varney transform government? If his record is anything to go by, not by helping the move to the left for which some Brown supporters still hope. As the *Eye* has revealed, Varney is nothing if not business-minded.

In the early 90s, as head of Shell (UK), Varney refused to recognise trade unions at the Shell Haven refinery, leading to a boycott of the firm's petrol stations by Transport and General Workers union members – the very union that 10 years earlier had Gordon Brown selected for his safe Dunfermline East seat (see *Eye* 1107).

After Shell, Varney took his charming style of management to then British Gas owner Transco. As chief executive he continually ignored warnings about faults in old pipes, spending a pitiful amount on repairs while billions were lavished on corporate financing deals – leading to the death of a family of four in a gas explosion in Scotland in 1999 for which Transco was eventually fined a record £15m (see *Eye* 1141).

As head of Mobile Phone firm O2 Varney sold the police a radio system, Airwave. The National Audit Office found Varney's firm was the only bidder and exploited its position to get maximum cash from the emergency services, diverting money from the front line.

Varney is widely credited with knocking heads together at Revenue and Customs and pushing the departments' merger through but he has failed to do much about spectacular failures such as tax credits. His new remit involves more online government services and pushing yet more hapless public servants into call centres. With his record, taxpayers and public alike might not be too encouraged.

CALLED TO ORDURE

CAN it be only three weeks since the "NatWest Three" were air-freighted to Texas, US marshals at their side, manacles dangling?

The Blair government kept stressing the merit of making suspects face justice in the jurisdiction of an alleged crime's victims (in that case, Enron investors). Tony Blair repeatedly said that it was "the right thing to do". Extradition was the hand-maid of global justice. Let truth be judged in open court!

In the House of Lords a few days later, however, the attorney-general proved very much cooler to the idea of extradition. A different case, you see. Politically more embarrassing. It concerned trigger-happy Israeli soldiers killing unarmed Brits. Suddenly extradition was a matter of great tentativity. Doubtful chins were stroked. Extradition? No, no, no, most difficult.

Lord Goldsmith was facing demands that the government try to extradite the Israeli soldier who allegedly killed James Miller, a TV documentary-maker shot in Rafah in 2003. Peers also wanted British justice to pass verdict on the 2003 murder of Tom Hurndall, a young British pro-Palestinian activist. A 22-year old Arab member of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) was given a short sentence for Hurndall's manslaughter. Taysir Hayb insisted he was made a "scapegoat" because he was a Bedouin.

Lib-Dem Lady Northover noted that Miller's suspected killer was "not only still in the Israeli Defence Force but has been promoted in it". It was hardly evidence that the Israelis were taking the matter seriously. She added that the British coroner investigating Miller's death was given the bum's rush by Israeli authorities. How much better had Goldsmith fared when he went to Israel recently? Oh, said Goldsmith, they had been most "cooperative".

Indeed. The Israelis were thinking about giving him some sensitive information which was at present not being made public. And, er, that was about it. He went on to explain that "it is difficult to reinvestigate something after this length of time" – not a difficulty, mind you, that has stopped the government spending umpteen hundred million on the Bloody Sunday inquiry.

Former Thatcherite Home Secretary Lord Waddington explained that James Miller was the brother of his daughter-in-law. An unhappy Waddington said that since any progress in Israel was "very unlikely", he felt that "a prosecution in England is at present the only way in which any justice will be done for James Miller's family".

Goldsmith claimed again that "the Israelis have been co-operative". He gave almost as little evidence to support this assertion as he did to support his now notorious change of mind that war against Iraq would be legal. Really, this was a lamentable performance.

Lord Thomas of Gresford (Lib Dem), a notoriously tenacious lawyer, then gave ministers and officials good reason to gulp. He started quoting the Geneva Conventions Act of 1957 and said that the unlawful killings of Miller and Hurndall had been ruled by the coroner to be "an extraditable offence with extra-territorial jurisdiction that the courts of this country have full power to deal with". In other words: we'd be well within our rights to tell Israel to hand over its suspected soldiers now, rather than fart around waiting for further time-wasting.

A watery Goldsmith accepted that "in theory, there are offences that would be extraditable" but tried to waffle that the coroner had not seen all the evidence. Yes, we know that. He himself had just admitted that the Israelis were withholding some of it.

"We are not at the stage where it would be right" to look at extradition, said Goldsmith. What a difference three weeks make!

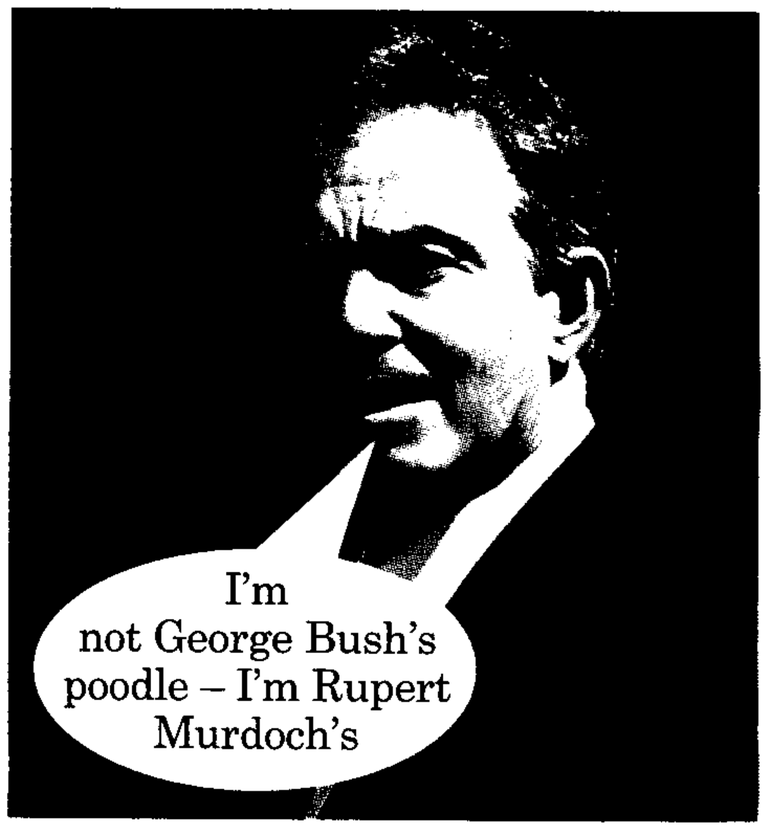
'Gavel Basher'

Number crunching

23 ■ Number of elected MPs in cabinet, which does not vote on policy

25 ■ Number of unelected "special advisers" employed by Number 10 to provide policy

BLAIR DENIAL



Number crunchings

2 ■ Charter flights carrying US bombs which stopped at Prestwick airport en route to Israel, angering government

£24m ■ Value of UK arms exports to Israel in 2005, delighting government

JOBS FOR THE GIRLS

MORE emerges on busy Barbara Thomas, chair of the Atomic Energy Authority, and how she landed *the job* as Britain's Atomic Kitten.

Lady Judge (she's married to Sir Paul Judge, the former Tory party director-general) holds many non-executive directorships, among them one at Quintain Estates and Developments plc, which owns land around the Dome and the new Wembley Stadium, both favoured as super casino sites by John Prescott's office.

In December 2003 Quintain, with Thomas's support, appointed senior DTI civil servant Joan MacNaughton to its board. MacNaughton was at the time director-general for energy, and was also believed to be pro-nuclear. By happy coincidence five months later MacNaughton chaired the selection panel that appointed Thomas as UKAEA chair.

MacNaughton refuses to answer questions about her relationship with Thomas, about Quintain or whether, within months of appointing Thomas to the UKAEA, she went on holiday to the La Villa Judge in southern France.

However, the DTI press office has finally confirmed that there was a holiday in August 2004 – but not who paid for it nor whether MacNaughton's husband, Bill Jeffrey, MoD permanent secretary and Tony Blair's chief spook at the Cabinet Office, tagged along.

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER NEWS

NATO forces have now taken control of military operations in southern Afghanistan from the so-called "Septics" (Septic tank = Yank) and still there are problems with kit, rations and the rules of engagement.

Luckily for the Ministry of Defence, we'll have to wait until parliament returns in October to discuss these matters.

So what's the mission exactly? Initially troops were deployed in the south to protect the Provincial Reconstruction Teams at work rebuilding the country. But 3 Para very quickly found itself mired in counter-insurgency bother, taking orders and air support from the Septics in Operation "Mountain Thrust" to clear areas under Taliban control.

Initially the lads were going to spearhead Tony's war on heroin without a shot being fired. But now Lieutenant General David Richards, force commander, has confirmed that poppy eradication will have to take a back seat until security is restored and infrastructure is improved. This will take years, particularly as Lieutenant General Richards blamed "poorly regulated private military contractors", ie American mercenaries, for making the general situation worse with their "all too ready to discharge firearms" approach to any Afghan they come across.

Meanwhile there are yet more shortages to report. Resupply using the five functioning Chinook helicopters is sporadic, while the availability of helicopters for medical evacuation is even more unpredictable.

'Square Basher'

Down on the Farm

AT LEAST one part of the government machine is still working with Rolls Royce efficiency. This is the system set up to ensure that no one can know how much damage is being done to people's health by exposure to toxic chemicals.

There is now a mountain of evidence to show that exposure to pesticides used in farming has caused one of the major public health disasters of our time. But equally powerful has been the determination of governments and pharmaceutical companies to deny the fact. This is because all these chemicals are officially approved as safe to use by regulatory bodies such as the pesticides safety directorate (PSD). If it were ever officially admitted that the chemicals were inflicting havoc on people's health, government and manufacturers might face compensation claims running into billions.

The latest heroine in the unending battle to expose this cover-up has been Georgina Downs, a young former singer who 15 years ago, living with her parents in Sussex, wondered why she and her family seemed to be perpetually ill. Was there any connection between this and the constant spraying of chemicals on the fields adjoining their garden? Certainly her family's symptoms became noticeably worse when spraydrift floated through their windows. Research showed that these symptoms were associated with exposure to toxic chemicals.

But Georgina was then shocked to discover that the regulatory system governing the use of chemical poisons by farmers has a mighty hole in it. First, farmers are under no obligation to tell their neighbours when they intended to spray or what chemicals they were using. Second, there are no rules to prevent farmers from spraying right next to homes, schools, footpaths or anywhere else the public might be exposed to those poisons. What made this worse was that the experiments on which the PSD relied to show that this was perfectly safe were based on the idea that people might only be exposed for seconds at a time, not the day-after-day exposure endured by Georgina's family and countless others.

Georgina's fight to expose this scandal has been one of the most remarkable examples of grass-roots campaigning of our time. Again and again she has embarrassed ministers and officials, catching them out in lies and prevarication. Particularly in her sights has been the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP), set up by Defra and the PSD to hold the line in denying that agricultural poisons are causing any damage to human health.

But last September it looked as if the line had at last been broken. In response to Georgina's badgering, Defra had asked the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution to investigate her charges, and its report was shockingly frank, virtually conceding all her points. It accepted that exposure to pesticides was causing a wide range of health problems, including cancers and leukaemia, and it called for much tighter controls on the use of pesticides to protect the public.

Now, however, the ACP has advised Defra as to how it should respond to this report. Its findings, it says, can be rejected. Any suggestion that pesticides are causing health problems is just wild speculation. No need for new regulations. The system is working fine. What a relief! What a surprise! At least we (and Defra) can take comfort that that Rolls Royce machine is working as efficiently as ever.

'Muckspreader'

BLACK WATCH WATCH

EVEN at the start of last month the Ministry of Defence was still denying rumours that the Third Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland – or the Black Watch, as it was known until Geoff Hoon's last set of amalgamations – was being sent back to Iraq.

The MoD has now stopped lying and admitted that The Jocks are on their way to Basra for the third time, breaching (again) the army's own formation readiness cycle, which is supposed to leave a 24-month gap between such deployments.

As well as being bad news for the soldiers, it's a gift for the Scottish National Party. Pete Wishart, the SNP MP for Perth, where recruitment is centred, said: "Whilst I have absolutely no doubt that the Black Watch will perform their mission with their customary professionalism it is simply not fair or right to put them back in Iraq for a third time.

"No other battalion or regiment has been asked to do so much in this conflict and the Black Watch have paid heavily for this over reliance. For months there has been speculation that the Black Watch would be redeployed to Iraq and every time I have raised this with the MoD I have been told that no such deployment would take place."

Meanwhile, last year, as part of the Irish peace process, the MoD told 3,000 Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) home service infantrymen that they were being made redundant in 2007, with pay-offs of around £28,000 each.

Suggestions that they might actually need these people were dismissed on the grounds that things were going so well, especially in Iraq. Last week, in a panic stricken move, the MoD doubled to £20,000 a golden "hello again" offer for those same soldiers if they agreed to re-enlist for worldwide service with the RIR – ie in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A high response rate is not expected – which is one reason the Black Watch will be packing their kit bags again.

"And all of this is for your personal consumption, sir...?"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

NOW that the Tories have announced their intention to pull out of the European People's Party and team up with Czech Eurosceptics in a new grouping, will ultra-Eurosceptic MEP Roger Helmer at last be restored to the bosom of the party?

Helmer had the party whip withdrawn in May 2005 after pressing the issue of whether European Commission President José Manuel Barroso should be censured for accepting hospitality aboard the yacht of Greek businessman Spiro Latsis, shortly before Latsis received EU grant funding. During one debate he criticised EPP president Hans-Gert Poettering for trying to prevent discussion of the issue and was chucked out of the group.

Although leaving the EPP was one of David Cameron's leadership campaign pledges, the new group will not be formed until 2009. MEPs who wish to quit the grouping earlier have been warned that they would be also quitting the Conservative party.

Mr Helmer and members of the local Reinstate Roger campaign find this particularly galling since, as things stand, he will not be allowed to stand as the Conservative Party candidate for his East Midlands Euro-constituency at the next Euro-elections.

TV

Top of the Pops - The Final Countdown (BBC2)

Golf: The Open (BBC2)

THE dread of executives who cancel a series is always that the final edition will leave the audience wishing there were going to be more. The methods of guarding against this include strategically starving the budget for the last few shows and ensuring that the closing programme is scheduled against some massive hit. However, for *Top of the Pops – The Final Countdown* – which marked the cancellation of a weekly BBC television music show after 42 years – the bigwigs had hit on the brilliant strategy of putting on screen all the reasons for the series being axed.

The octogenerian Sir Jimmy Savile, the now snow-bearded DLT, the weirdly-toupeed Tony Blackburn and Mike Read looking even more than ever like the picture Cliff Richard keeps in the attic were all swaying arthritically on stage as they introduced videos of acts from the last four decades. By parading these has-beens and omitting any live acts or music of the moment except a video of the number one – when liveness and topicality were the entire point of *Top of the Pops* – the producers ruthlessly ensured that any lost viewers tuning in to see the last edition could only conclude that this was an exhausted format whose achievements were entirely in the past.

Everything about the show was shaming. Blackburn, introducing archive footage of Madonna, constructed an elaborate metaphor about her having been the "queen of 80s music", purely in order to describe her, unfunnily and inaccurately, as "an old queen". Token young DJ Reggie Yates stood beside him looking embarrassed, although it could have been worse. The previous material linked by Blackburn had been George Michael and Wham, raising the possibility that execs had done some judicious redistribution of Blackburn's "jokes".

On the other hand, though, the scripts elsewhere betrayed a lack of editing. Later, Mike Read declared that appearing on the last *TOTP* was a "unique and unusual honour", a uniquely horrible tautology.

Savile got to end the show, turning out the studio lights and then walking away with a cigar. He shook his head theatrically as he went, presumably lamenting either the crassness of the final programme or the BBC's decision to let *Top of the Pops* go. If he was thinking the former, he's definitely right: a historic TV franchise deserved better obsequies than this geriatric shambles.

If, though, Savile's complaint is the latter, it's more complicated. Falling ratings and the now numerous rival ways of watching or downloading music made a very strong case for cancellation. What's worrying, as so often with BBC decisions, is that they are dismantling a large plank of television music coverage without revealing any serious plans for replacement. It's fine to argue that young viewers were deserting *TOTP*, but what are BBC1 and BBC2 doing instead to make the BBC and the licence-fee valid to that section of the audience? There seems to be a big shrug over that which, sadly, is neither unique nor unusual in the history of BBC management.

From a format the BBC was desperate to get rid of to one it's obsessed with keeping: **Open Golf** is one of the few live sports the corporation has managed to keep away from advertising and satellite channels and so each year's coverage betrays a terror of the prize being taken away.

The problem for the BBC, as at Wimbledon, is that the steps it might have normally taken to freshen a programme – new personnel, technical innovations – tend to irritate the ancient blazers who hand out the television rights. In tennis, the supernaturally dull John Barrett was kept in the commentary box until this summer, years past his sell-by date, because the old crusties at the All England Club liked him. Similarly, the 75-year-old Peter Allis still gets to call the golf, despite a recent catastrophic misunderstanding when describing the position on the final green, because the boys at the 19th hole of the Royal and Ancient still like the cut of his jib.

Keen to find another way of livening things up, the execs took the opportunity of personality-free presenter Steve Rider's defection to ITV to bring in Gary Lineker. Allis was appalled by the intrusion of a chap from the big round-ball game who doesn't even wear a tie and promptly slagged off Gazza in a golf mag, creating an enjoyable froideur when the men were required to hand over to each other during the coverage.

The problem was that Gazza's shtick is to crack cheeky-chappy gags and yet he found himself presiding over a shoot-out between Tiger Woods, who had just lost his dad, and Chris De Marco, whose mom had just died. With both golfers declaring in interviews that their dead parent was guiding them round the course, it all got a bit much for someone whose knowledge of theology extends to dressing as a nun in a Walker's crisp ad. Hopelessly out of his depth, Lineker asked a hopelessly sobbing Tiger Woods to "take us through your emotions out there." Allis, surprisingly, dared to be irreverent, suggesting, when Di Marco missed a simple putt that that "mum must have popped out for a cup of tea during that one". Even so, it wasn't enough to prevent any sports viewer under 60 feeling the urge to go and put the kettle on when Allis speaks.

'Remote Controller'

THE REAL & ORIGINAL

DUMB BRITAIN

ONLY in Private Eye!

Big Brother, C4

Question: In what year did man first land on the moon?

Imogen: 1903.

Question: In Roman numerals, what does "L" stand for?

Imogen: Laughing.

Question: How many days are there in a leap year?

Imogen: There are 365 days in a normal year... [much agonising]... so... 360.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which royal family that ruled Holland in the 18th century shares its name with a fruit?

Contestant: Er... Kronenbourg?

Read it here first before "brainless" Metro rips off the idea!

MEDIA NEWS

"THE overwhelming emotion here is anger," revealed ITV News reporter Julian Manyon as his camera operator filmed Lebanese civilians who had just been bombed by Israeli jets in Tyre.

"Some of this anger has been turned on journalists," he added, as his colleague filmed another photographer being attacked by a small crowd.

The ITV team recorded every kick and punch before heroically recording their hasty exit, leaving their fellow journo to the mercy of the mob.

BACK in 1995, the then BBC director-general John Birt was widely lampooned for wasting licence-payers' money on several reviews that highlighted the rather obvious notion that "programme makers and technical staff should cooperate closely in programme making".

Now, the new D-G, Mark Thompson has spent £1.1m, including £76,000 for consultants and £140,000 for hotels and hospitality, on a Creative Review that makes precisely the same recommendation: "Editorial content people and those with technical skills should work closely together." Brilliant!

CONGRATULATIONS to Sky News, who scooped the world by revealing on 17 July that Gordon Brown's baby son – then only a few hours old – would be named Gordon after his father.

Two days later, along with the rest of the media, it noted that he was to be called James Fraser Brown.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Don't let anyone tell you that newsreaders write their own scripts, because they don't. I've been there and I've worked on both sides of the camera, so I can be honest about it."

– Angela Rippon

"It's complete rubbish that newsreaders don't write their own material. I did a postgraduate degree in journalism and then went through thorough BBC training."

– Sophie Raworth

Good Housekeeping

MARK THOMPSON, the BBC director-general, took time out from his busy schedule of 360 degree multi-platform content creation recently to pen a personal message to the colleagues and family of a BBC employee who had died of leukaemia.

They were pleased to learn that "the work that Simon contributed to the BBC exemplified our values, and brought tremendous value to the corporation – empowering our audiences and helping to create an open and more creative organisation. He will be sorely missed."

Birtspeak lives...

IN THE week that Michael Grade defended the pay rises of up to 25 percent awarded to BBC executives (including a jump in his own salary of £57,000 a year), corporation staff in Manchester received a tempting invitation.

Their managers had organised a talk by a representative of the Financial Services Authority entitled "Make the Most of Your Money."

THE BBC is advertising for an assistant editor to work at BBC Oxford. The candidate will need "a highly collaborative approach when managing people and talent".

He or she will also need to fulfil 12 listed "Key Behaviours", 25 "Leadership Competencies", including "helping people to have fun at work", 19 "management competencies", 13 collaboration targets across boundary goals, 11 provisions of "direction through change", 14 targets for "maximising business performance", 13 for "collaborating across boundaries" and 15 opportunities for "using external thinking".

In full, the job description runs to 2,000 words across three pages of A4.

"WHY do the BBC's war reporters refuse to wear ties?" demanded former corporation employee (and mouthpiece of Mohammed Fayed) Michael Cole, addressing "the issue irritating viewers" in the *Daily Mail* last Friday.

"When reporting on a war with daily deaths, it is utterly disrespectful to be standing in an open-necked shirt, looking as though you are dressed for the beach... I reported for the BBC from 56 countries but whether it was a war or a royal tour, I was conscious of representing the corporation and always dressed respectably."

He was, of course, sacked from his post as royal correspondent for blabbing the contents of the Queen's speech to a group of tabloid hacks during a boozy lunch in Fleet Street, but *Mail* readers can rest assured he was impeccably clad at the time.

SO, Alastair Stewart, what was your most embarrassing moment? "I missed a line on the teleprompter," the ITV newscaster replied in a Q&A in Monday's *Indie*.

The fact that he was found guilty of drink-driving while presenting *Police, Camera, Action!*, and subsequently dropped from the job of hosting ITV's series about dangerous drivers, was obviously not half so embarrassing – in fact not worth mentioning at all.

TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SHAYLER

SOON after former MI5 officer David Shayler blew the whistle on the ineptitude of the intelligence services in 1997 by talking to the *Mail on Sunday*, the government won a temporary injunction forbidding the disclosure of any information he obtained while working for the security service, relating to "the security service or its membership or activities or to security or intelligence activities generally", pending his trial for breaching the Official Secrets Act.

Last week at the high court Mr Justice Eady made that injunction permanent, meaning that any further disclosure from Shayler must be approved by the security services themselves, or taken to judicial review, before they can be reported, regardless of whether or not they pose any threat to national security.

A major plank of Shayler's case has always been that there was no effective official internal channel for raising his concerns and that he has, to this day, had no reply to his letters to ministers asking for investigation of his allegations. Thus, he says, to make anyone listen to very serious matters of public interest, he had no other choice but to go to the media to draw attention to working practices that were hopelessly inefficient or illegal. Once again, last week the attorney-general's lawyers insisted in court that internal whistleblowing channels do exist.

So how interested in what Shayler had to say were those in charge of the nation's security services at the time when he was witnessing such shoddy spying? Former MI6 boss Stella Rimington was in charge during the Gadaffi assassination plot that Shayler alleges was MI6-funded. He passed his concerns on to his bosses at the time – and they should surely have passed them on to the chief of the service involved. But when challenged about the plot in an in-depth interview published in the *Times* on July 25, Rimington weaselled: "I haven't read what Shayler said."

AD NAUSEAM

EVENTS in the build-up to England's second Test against Pakistan prove that the Curse of the Cash-in has indeed spread from footie to cricket (see last *Eye*).

After Matthew Hoggard's freak hand injury on the eve of the first Test against Pakistan (spoiling Sky's advertising), attention turned to Northern Rock, the bank whose ads have long been the kiss of death for sportsmen in their pay from Jonny Wilkinson to Michael Owen (*Eyes passim*).

Northern Rock has been running ads showing the backs of cricket shirts of a proud roster of Durham players called up to the England squad. The latest example broke as the test squad was announced, whereupon Liam Plunkett immediately picked-up a side strain and was ruled out of the game. Jamie Dalrymple, meanwhile, didn't make the side.

BACK in the world of football, meanwhile, Asda has cancelled its £3m deal with Wayne Rooney just three months after it began.

Asda's American owner Wal-Mart is thought to have been roundly unimpressed by Rooney's World Cup antics. Luckily for them it had also signed Michael Owen as a fall back... who returned home in the early stages with knee ligament damage.

THE Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice states that "alcoholic drinks containing 1.2 per cent alcohol or more by volume must not be advertised in or adjacent to children's programmes or programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to audiences below the age of 18."

So how did ITV try to get round this when watchdog Ofcom challenged it over the sponsorship of a lunchtime broadcast of *Mary Poppins* by Cobra lager?

The broadcaster argued that the Disney classic "should be regarded as a family film rather than a children's programme." Coming soon: *Watch With Mother*... in association with Special Brew.

IN THE good old days, Coca-Cola merely wanted to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. Nowadays it's dead set on getting as many people's backs up as possible – or at least that's how it seems from its work for the launch of Coke Zero.

The £8m cross-media campaign, created by VCCP, is based on the idea that people – specifically blokes – want certain things in life without the attendant downside. Coke Zero, the posters and TV spots conclude, offers "Great Coke Taste" without the downside of sugar.

Unfortunately it turns out that there is a downside to such a strategy – in the form of a slew of objections. One spot with the strap "Blind dates without the psychos" has prompted complaints to the ASA from mental health charities and both "Gigs without tall people" and "Girlfriends without a five-year plan" have also met with criticism from, er, tall people and women's groups respectively. What these nitpickers plainly fail to realise, according to Adrian Coleman, Coke's account director at VCCP, is that "the campaign we've created for Coca-Cola Zero is more than just advertising. It's also an anthem for modern men across the country, based on real insights about life as a man in 2006."

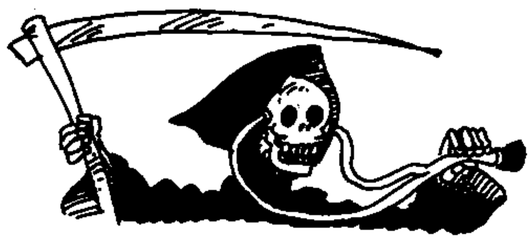
Baked bean rivals begin to feel the wind of change

Financial Times

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SUPERMODELS CHRISTY TURLINGTON & LINDA EVANGELISTA DISAGREE:
I WON'T USE BOTOX!
I CAN'T SAY THAT I AGREE WITH YOU!
WHY NOT?
COS MY MOUTH WON'T MOVE ENOUGH TO FORM THE RIGHT WORDS!
Rigid



MEDICINE BALLS

1. Regulating doctors

WHAT's the best way to regulate doctors? No one seems to know – and least of all the chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson.

His post-Shipman review ("Good Doctors, Safer Patients"), is full of the same vacuous rhetoric as its post-Bristol predecessor ("Supporting Doctors, Protecting Patients"); and its scatter gun approach of 44 recommendations could just add a hugely expensive "scrutiny bureaucracy" without making doctors better or patients safer.

Donaldson's most contentious suggestion is for the burden of proof in actions against doctors to be lowered from criminal ("beyond reasonable doubt") to civil ("on the balance of probability"). This may pick up doctors who are dangerous for patients but not too dangerous for the GMC, but it may also result in mass suspensions and a surge in defensive medicine where doctors over-investigate and refer rather than take the buck themselves. This would be extremely expensive and counter to the government's aim of getting GPs to accept more responsibility and minimise hospital care.

Donaldson also wants doctors to be re-licensed every five years, rather than just once on qualification and never again thereafter. This sounds reasonable, and indeed M.D. underwent a form of re-licensing last year when he returned to general practice after a career break. It consisted of a knowledge based multiple-choice questionnaire, two hours' worth of video consultations and a structured trainer's report. I passed, but then again the tests are hard to fail. The MCQ is positively marked, so a monkey with a pencil would get 50 percent by chance alone. The video does not have to be continuous, so you can exclude any consultation where you've cocked up badly. And trainers have a habit of passing their trainees, lest it reflect badly on their teaching.

What matters is not whether doctors can jump through the artificial hoops of exams (most can, which is how we became doctors in the first place) but whether the consequences of our everyday actions lead to avoidable harm for patients. The most useful scrutiny M.D. has had is the analysis of his actions by other doctors, particularly the cock-ups and near misses. For example, I recently diagnosed a patient's chest pain as non-cardiac, based on the history. Four months later, he had a heart attack.

Like any other doctor, I want to now if I got it wrong and if so what I should do to get it right next time. Most GP practices and hospitals have regular significant event audit meetings: some are rigorous and at times brutal, but others tend to be too uncritical for fear of upsetting colleagues. What's needed are doctors in every region, who are independent of the medical establishment, to analyse potential errors in a fair and balanced way. Both doctors and patients would then get quick, impartial feedback. And those doctors who repeatedly err would be picked up earlier.

M.D. first argued for an independent medical inspectorate focusing on errors in 1999 (*Eye* 989). Sir Liam's answer is to introduce local, medically qualified "GMC affiliates", paired with a public buddy. But without true independence, it seems no more likely to succeed than the "Assessment and Support Centres" he proposed seven years ago.

M.D.

FURTHER EDUCATION NEWS

LIKE most higher education institutions, the University of Bristol talks big about its "commitment to equality and diversity" – so why is it closing its specialist courses giving blind people access to field and lab work?

The Centre for Access and Communication Studies (CACS) has been running short courses, usually one term in length, for blind and visually impaired people for 25 years, with experienced volunteers supporting field work, lab work and other practical work. The tutors have developed expertise in helping sight-impaired people and have designed numerous learning aids, such as tactile maps and course materials in formats such as Braille.

But during a review of the centre's work, the courses for visually impaired people "turned out to be problematic", says the university, which recently wrote to students saying that there is "little academic rationale" for the courses and – now that certain European grant programmes are finishing – "financial provision is inadequate". Staff have been issued with redundancy notices and there will be no more courses after this year.

In a letter responding to student complaints, the university says it appreciates that the courses have been "very enjoyable for those who have taken part" – a patronising pat on the head given that the courses are not just leisure activities, but involve independent study and are assessed for credit points towards academic qualifications. Other short "continuing education" courses for the sighted, such as "Understanding your Victorian House" and Advanced Classical Greek, will continue.

Asked whether scrapping the courses for visually impaired people really reflected "commitment to equality and diversity", Mr Barry Taylor, the university's communications director, pointed out that courses for the people with hearing impairment would be continuing, and that the cuts for the visually impaired are because of "the way the funding system works, not of any bias against a particular type of impairment". In other words, sorry, you've got the wrong disability – that's commitment to equality in action!

SIGNAL FAILURES

The same old Tory

SO THE Tories have acknowledged the shocking inefficiency of privatised rail. We haven't heard the same admission from Labour, which opposed privatisation yet is still wasting billions of pounds on continuing the inefficiency.

But the Tories deserve no credit for their contrition. They were warned against privatisation by Labour MPs and others. Now they can see it's wrong but still have no idea why.

Shadow Transport Secretary Chris Grayling talks of bringing together management of tracks and trains through joint ventures or partnerships. He dislikes Network Rail, presumably as it's effectively nationalised; but the best criticisms he can think of are that it isn't boosting capacity for predicted passenger growth and hasn't done enough to overcome Railtrack's appalling legacy.

The Tories still don't appreciate the mismatch between the rail industry's long timescales and private firms' duty to satisfy shareholders every year. Railtrack plc kept up its share price by slashing vital maintenance, paying consultants to tell it a stitch in time wouldn't save nine. Overcoming the damage Failtrack inflicted in just a few years – physical damage through neglect plus the loss of knowledge about asset conditions – still requires more toil and expense.

At least NR saves hundreds of millions each year because it took maintenance in-house, instead of paying profit-hungry contractors. With no pressure for annual dividends, NR can invest in repairs designed to pay off over 30 years and more. The Tories, still slaves to the same old dogma, want to sweep away that progress instead of building on it. Grayling's method of merging tracks and trains would see the likes of FirstGroup (which can't even maintain buses properly – see *Eyes passim*) entrusted with tracks and signals for the duration of its franchises; maintenance would be tailored to each year's annual results *and* the possibility the tracks could change hands after a few years (a constraint even Railtrack didn't suffer). Alternatively, private firms would win permanent tenure of regions, destroying NR's economies of scale and creating problems (yet more work for costly lawyers) for other train operators entitled to use the same tracks.

There's another mismatch the Tories haven't noticed, despite the furore over First Capital Connect's fare rises. Rail subsidy is justified by rail's social, economic and environmental benefits – but private franchisees' sole concern is to minimise costs and maximise income. Their answer to growing demand is not extra trains, which cost more, but fares hikes. It makes sense for Virgin, for instance, to carry empty seats in and out of London and Manchester (*Eyes passim*) in peak hours because it can charge a fortune for peak fares. But then we're subsidising train companies *not* to help cut road congestion and *not* to help poor people travel to work or healthcare appointments.

So Grayling's wrong to blame NR for overcrowding. NR provides infrastructure for longer trains but private train operators are incentivised not to exploit it, and to leave hundreds of good intercity carriages rot in sidings pending export or scrap. Some of the worst overcrowding is in provincial cities like Leeds, Manchester and Cardiff, which struggle with crappy old diesel trains because all the cash available goes on high lease charges which don't reflect the trains' depreciation. Somehow the Tories are silent on the rip-off rolling stock leasing companies, which even Labour is belatedly trying to tackle (see last *Eye*).

WHILE David Cameron tries to convince voters his party takes green issues seriously, Conservative councils are making public transport less attractive by scrapping bus lanes.

Birmingham city council (under Tory/Lib Dem rule) "suspended" some of Brum's bus infrastructure last year and has now torpedoed a planned bus route on Hagley Road. Ealing council has voted to "remove" bus lanes under the pretence of assessing whether they worsen congestion for motorists. Will Cameron explain to his councillors the whole point of bus lanes is not to make life easier for car users but to encourage them to go by bus, or does his greenness not stretch as far as risking upsetting the motoring lobby?

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DUFFER DES

DESPITE having a degree in biochemistry and being a member of the Commons science and technology select committee, Brighton Kemptown's Labour MP Des Turner clearly has not got the hang of this email thingie yet.

The day before Skidrow-on-Sea council voted to ignore an act of parliament and allow a developer to build a 40-storey tower on the beach at Brighton Marina, Turner emailed all councillors, urging them to do just that. "I support the waiving of the cliff height provision... and I would urge you to cast your vote in favour..." he wrote.

In 1968, when Brighton's Marina was planned, an act was passed which specifically outlawed any development at beach level which would rise above the tops of the cliffs behind. Brunswick Developments' proposal for a 135-metre tower at the centre of a complex of 850 apartments would certainly do that, clashing with Kemptown's elegant terraces and ruining sea views across Brighton. It has inspired fierce opposition locally.

So why was Turner so keen for councillors to vote in favour? Back to his email. Turner forwarded his plea on top of a message he had received from Andrew Goodall, managing director of developers Brunswick. Goodall supplied a list of the email addresses of all Skidrow councillors and asked "Dear Des" to pen a few lines in support because "they have received many e-mails from the objectors, and I feel it would give them more confidence in a yes vote if they were to hear from the supporters!"

Turner, evidently being a bit of a thicko where technology is concerned, forgot to delete this evidence of just how easy it is for developers to get MPs and councillors to do their bidding.

PS: Perhaps he was preoccupied by his pending case before the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Philip Mawer, who last week ordered Turner to apologise to a Skidrow housing officer whom he had called "a little fucking useless pen-pusher". Turner's apology is believed to be in the post. Sadly this means he probably won't be suspended from parliament or have his salary withdrawn or – better – be imprisoned in the Westminster clock tower for 10 months.

● AT THE high court last week the Sunderland Housing Group and its chief executive Peter Walls (*Eyes passim*) obtained an injunction to close down the website www.dadsplace.co.uk, which for the past two years has lifted the lid on some of the murkier goings-on in that city. Walls has now spent many tens of thousands of pounds of tenants' money trying to crush Dadsplace, which is a one-man operation run by a 36-year-old IT worker, John Baines. The injunction remains in force until the resolution of a libel case against Dadsplace by Walls and others.

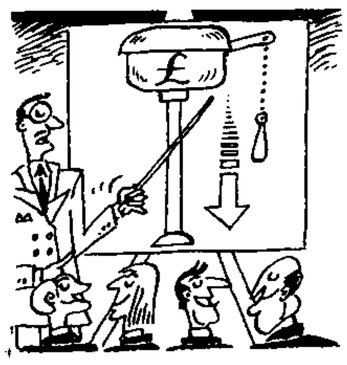
COME IN No 5a

AS THE investigation continues into whether the leader of the BNP group on Barking and Dagenham council, Richard Barnbrook, should be disqualified as a councillor for having given his home address as 5a London Road – a derelict property – there has been much sniggering among those who have had the privilege of listening to Barnbrook's "explanation".

According to Barnbrook, he put 5a down on his electoral registration form to stand as a councillor as his wife had recently booted him out of the matrimonial home and he had nowhere permanent to stay. Barnbrook's split with his wife did not come as a complete surprise to those close to him. It had long been a joke it was little more than "a marriage of convenience" – the very thing the BNP so strongly disapproves of among immigrants in the UK.

Locals are now talking about putting up a blue plaque up on the wall of 5a, reading: "Richard Barnbrook never lived here."

SILLY BUGGY



ALDERNEY Electricity (AE) – one of the smallest power firms in the world – is having an Enron moment. A recent audit revealed that "irregularities have arisen in earlier years as a result of unauthorised activities by the former general manager" – ie he had his hand in the till.

John Buggy, former chair of the States (parliament) of Alderney's policy and finance committee, was so successful at trousering AE's petty cash over the years that the total bill he was presented with when the crime was exposed was £38,343.

Buggy has been allowed to pay back the cash (with interest) without any further action being taken. AE, although a private utility, is 78 percent owned by the States. The States representative on the AE board at the time of the fraud was one John Postlethwaite, who has a sound grasp of ethics. (As *Eye* 1145 reported, when he was revealed to have a serious conflict of interest over a planning application last year, he retorted: "If everyone knows you've got a conflict of interest, then it doesn't matter.") Likewise AE chairman Dick Haines is satisfied that the matter has been handled in an appropriate manner. But then Haines was chairman while Buggy was raiding the firm for cash, and didn't notice. Nor did Postlethwaite, who as the representative of the major shareholder, had a responsibility to know what was going on.

● IN 1985 Lambeth council scrapped its five area housing offices and replaced them with 31 neighbourhood offices. The change was meant to increase efficiency and save money.

I-SPY *St Giles Cemetery, Cambridge*

Submitted by Nick Finer. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

But thinking changes in the go-ahead world of local government. Exactly 20 years later, in 2005, Lambeth scrapped the neighbourhood offices and centralised the housing department all over again. The change was intended to, er, increase efficiency and save money – £11m in fact.

One year on, auditor Pricewaterhouse-Coopers has told councillors that the "reframing" did not quite produce savings of £11m. Rather, it cost the council an extra £6m. Ah, well – only £17m out! These figures do not take into account last year's £3m fraud in which Lambeth ended up paying for central heating systems that did not exist (*Eyes passim*).

WAR ON WANTAGE

TORY-controlled Oxfordshire county council has appalled locals by approving a planning application to fill in a lake at Radley, near Abingdon, with waste ash from nearby Didcot power station.

The lake, a restored former gravel pit, is a popular beauty spot and wildlife haven. There has been much opposition to the scheme, with 11,500 people signing a petition against. Locals are wondering how the Tories could have ignored local opinion – and the council's own policies – to such an extent.

Perhaps they should ask Mrs Yvonne Constance OBE, for an explanation. As chairman of the Wantage constituency Conservative association she is responsible for overseeing the selection of many Tory county council candidates and monitoring their performance as councillors. She also manages local Cameroonian MP Ed Vaizey's constituency affairs. (Vaizey is unlikely to suffer any political backlash to the scheme personally, because although the ash will come from the Didcot power station, in his constituency, it will be dumped in neighbouring Lib Dem Evan Harris's Oxford West and Abingdon seat.)

Mrs Constance, meanwhile, has a unique understanding of why it is necessary to dump thousands of tonnes of ash at such an environmentally sensitive site – she also happens to be the chairman of RWE nPower's "corporate responsibility" committee!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

HIRING A GIANT TRAMPOLINE WAS MEANT TO BE A TREAT FOR THE KIDS
BUT THEY HAVEN'T HAD A LOOK IN – JEZ AND QUIN HAVE BEEN HOGGING IT ALL AFTERNOON...
BOING
HARVESTING CRAB APPLES MADE EASY!
PRISTINE FRUIT JUST AN ARM'S LENGTH AWAY – SMELL THE JELLY!

● JOB of the month in *Grauniad*, where Kettering borough council is advertising for a new deputy chief executive:

"together as one [*sic*]

"So why do geese fly in this formation?

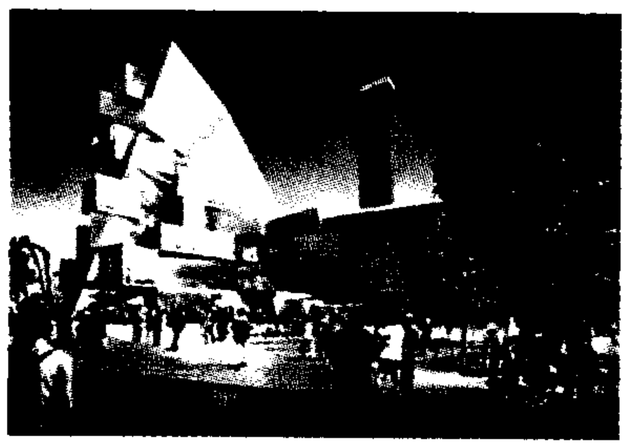
"It maximises lift, for everyone except the lead goose – so they take it in turns. If a bird is sick or injured at least two others will drop out with it so the goose is not isolated. By these techniques, geese can achieve almost twice the distances they would fly alone.

"Sound like the type of team you want to be part of? c£80,000. More available for exceptional geese".

The ad fails to mention the other thing that geese are famous for, apart from flying in formation, ie producing enormous quantities of crap!

NOOKS and CORNERS

DOES one laugh or cry? Having taken on and converted one of the very largest structures in London, Bankside Power Station, one might have thought Tate Modern was big enough. But no: the ambition of our modern museum and art gallery trustees and directors is insatiable.



The Tate has revealed plans to expand at Bankside with a structure designed by the architects who altered and adapted the redundant power station, Herzog & De Meuron. This is different from their earlier work, and is a pathetic attempt to do a Zaha Hadid or a Frank Gehry. They propose a "cut glass ziggurat"; that is, an incoherent pile of faceted glazed surfaces which will rise to 100ft – high above the existing Tate Modern.

This extension is totally discordant with the noble planes of beautiful brickwork which characterise what is left of old Bankside Power Station, that late work by the great Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Cathedral and, of course, poor old Battersea Power Station. It will also spoil the view of Tate Modern from across the river.

Naturally this ridiculous proposal has been greeted with enthusiasm by the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) and other authorities in thrall to the cult of the superstar or signature architect.

It was of course a mistake ever to have commissioned Jacques Herzog and Pierre De Meuron to adapt Bankside in the first place. This pair of crop-haired, black-shirted pouting Swiss egomaniacs were then best known for having designed an unusual signal box outside Basel station. But foreign superstars can do no wrong. That Herzog & De Meuron not only had no understanding of Giles Scott's architecture but actively disliked it was soon evident when they destroyed the powerful ziggurat profile of this last great "temple of power" by plonking on an asymmetrical glazed attic storey and then, to add insult to injury, by placing the silly glass box on the top of Scott's carefully modelled campanile-chimney which now sits there like the cap of a toothpaste tube, robbing it of all monumentality and dignity. It is also worth noting that if, after their conversion, one of the largest buildings in London does not function well and is too small, perhaps they did not do a very good job.

But now this self-satisfied Swiss pair of geniuses (who refused to allow the Wobbly Bridge over the Thames physically to connect with Tate Modern, as would be more convenient for the public) is poised to wreck the south side of Scott's building. At present this contains an electricity sub-station, but rather than convert this, half of Scott's symmetrical brick elevation – including the central entrance – is to be destroyed. The Twentieth Century Society is objecting, but who can stop this posturing, philistine vandalism?

Tate Modern enjoys no statutory protection as the government refused to list this manifestly significant work by a great British 20th century architect when Nuclear Electric was trying to flog the site for development (it was only saved by the Tate taking it on). Soon there may be nothing left to testify to Giles Scott's sublime genius as an industrial designer, what with the Guinness Brewery wickedly destroyed (*Eye* 1134, 1154), Battersea about to lose its chimneys (*Eyes passim*) and what remains of Bankside threatened with more mutilation.

LONDON faces many other threats too, being in the middle of an insane building boom, fuelled by a government that is in thrall to commerce and enamoured of both tall buildings and superstar architects.

The government's impatience with the planning system, which developers want "speeded up", and its contempt for both heritage protection and local democratic controls are already demonstrated by the nefarious proposal to de-list the Commonwealth Institute by act of parliament (Eye 1160). So it is no surprise that the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, is to be granted greater powers to approve "strategic" projects and impose development plans on the boroughs. So much for local planning committees. As Ken loves tall buildings, we can look forward to many more of them.

There is some hope, however, even in parliament, for some MPs seem still to be reasonably civilized. The Commons culture, media and sport committee has just released its report on "Protecting and Preserving our Heritage" and it is very critical of both the government and DCMS itself – and supportive of poor old English Heritage. "We find the logic underlying DCMS's explanation of why funding to English Heritage has decreased in real terms in recent years unconvincing, and it inevitably leads observers to conclude that its claim to attach priority to heritage issues is cosmetic and not born out by the facts. We can see no reason why funding for English Heritage should remain at a level which is clearly insufficient…"

The DCMS is also castigated for doing little or nothing about the continuing, scandal of levying VAT on repairs but not on new build, while "the omission of a reference to the importance of the historic environment from the Prime Minister's recent 'priorities' letter to DCMS is a surprising and worrying omission, given the emphasis the Government places on regeneration…"

'Piloti'

"Look, darling – I think he's going to be an architect"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THREE years ago, when it was announced that Liverpool had won the government's backing as European Capital of Culture for 2008, there were a good few sniggers up the sleeve within the British arts establishment – and not just among the 11 failed contenders for this nicely funded beanfeast.

The government's decision looked suspiciously as though it had been based on politics rather than merit and three years on, the sniggers have turned into raucous laughter as the city's plans are floundering in disarray: nowhere near the degree of preparedness they need to be with less than 18 months to go, and with no one in artistic charge now that the woman given that responsibility has either walked out or been sacked, depending on whom you ask.

In the attempt to find something meaningful to fill its year, the city appointed a commercial organisation, the "Liverpool Culture Company" to run the whole project. Bizarrely, the said Culture Company then handed over artistic control to a lady called Robyn Archer who did have some experience of running arts festivals (in Australia) but was better known as a cabaret singer.

From the time of her appointment, Archer all but vanished. She was barely seen in Liverpool: when people asked, it was explained that she was travelling the globe in search of talent. Meanwhile, nothing except vague ideas and windy rhetoric materialised. Behind the rousing, upbeat jollity of the Liverpool 08 website and publicity machinery lay an enormous, gaping void. And the other week it was announced that Ms Archer was "with very much regret" packing her bags to go back to Australia. Official reason? Worries about the health of her aged mother.

The Liverpool Culture Company has now gone into overdrive, issuing the standard crisis-management statements about future confidence, shared vision, targeted delivery, etc, and of course, denying that there *is* a crisis. Everything is proceeding smoothly, insisted the company's chief executive Jason Harborow even as he admitted that the termination of Robyn Archer's contract had been done by phone. What's more, "the artistic programme will [now] be done by the people of Liverpool not to them", he said, apparently inviting anyone with the ghost of an idea to chip in.

"I think classical music's been dumbed down too much"

Not that he's desperate, you understand. You only have to see that website, promising a "year-long festival of spectacular events… £2bn investment… £220m tourist income… involving 1bn people from five continents", to know it's going to be wonderful. It's just that it would be nice to know what these wonderful things might be. The only information extractable from the company alludes to entertainments like "the world's biggest star-gazing event" and "Europe's first ever exhibition of contemporary Chinese art". Well, hold me back.

One consolation, though, is that it's possible to buy right now an awful lot of artful items (possibly Chinese) commemorating in advance what may or may not happen in this year of culture: key-rings, T-shirts, baseball caps… and a delightful ornament to grace your mantelpiece called "Superlamb banana". It's exactly what it says, a lamb morphed into a banana, branded with the Liverpool 08 logo. Yours for £27.99 and a collector's item. Even more so if the Year of Culture fails to happen.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Yo Simon

Sir,

You have reported (Eye, 1163) that the founder of the sushi chain Yo, Simon Woodroffe who's name appears in a list of Labour party donors claims that he has not as yet made any financial contribution towards the party fund. Could it be that his donation to the Labour party is the right of use of his company name to be used by the closest friends of Mr Blair when addressing/summoning him?

Regards,
DIPAK GHOSH,

Bridge of Allan, Stirling.

Gnome from home

Sir,

Following Alan Jessop's spotting of misplaced Eye stock in the sports section of his local retailer, due to the Rooney cover, I must report that that large 24-hour Tesco out in the middle of nowhere (what do you mean which one?) had the entirety of its Eye 1163 stock placed in Home and Garden. I can only suppose it must have been either the vegetables displayed on the cover (Blair and Levy) or the repeated reference inside to one "Lord Gnome" which caused confusion this time.

Yours,
JOHN BREEZE,

Sheffield.

Pension pot of gold

Sir,

I can tell Remote Controller why BBC senior managers have had their bonuses cut and transferred the cash to salaries. BBC pension payouts are calculated on basic salaries. Any extras such as bonuses do not count towards your pension contributions. By moving their rewards to salaries they will inflate their pension pots beyond the obscenely high levels they already enjoy. As an exercise in self-serving greed it has not been bettered. Meanwhile the poor bloody sods at the bottom have been offered a pay rise 0.5 percent below the rate of inflation and have been told that the BBC has no more money to improve that offer. Perhaps if senior managers, many of whom would struggle to get a job outside the corporation, had been a little less keen to trouser large amounts of licence payers' cash, there might be a bit more for everyone else.

NICK SERPELL,

Father of the Chapel, National Union of Journalists, BBC News 24.

Lookalike

Beckett

Dodd

Sir,

I must question whether one of only four women to hold one of the Great Offices of State is able to concurrently perform duties as the leader of Diddyland and mayor of Knotty Ash. Surely these three great burdens would be too much for one mere mortal?

Yours,
SEBASTIAN GRAY,

London.

School rules

Sir,

Andrew Fellows, the senior governor of Bedgebury School, states: "We may have a moral obligation to the children but, as an educational charity, our first duty is to the charity."

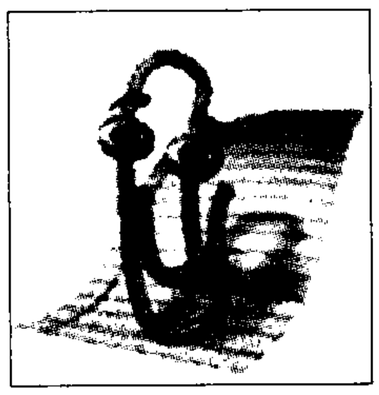
According to Macnaghten's "Four Heads of Charity" (1891), an organisation can be deemed a charity if it exercises all, or any, of the following 4 practices:

1) The Relief of Poverty
2) The Advancement of Education
3) The Advancement of Religion
4) Any other activities deemed beneficial to the public at large (known as the Presumption of Public Benefit).

So that's all right then!!

CHRISTOPHER PRICE,
(Bursar, Merton Court School).

Lookalike



Mandelson

Clipit

Sir,

Whilst writing one of my many specifications for an IT project that I am working on, I couldn't help but notice the similarity between 'Clipit', the little Office assistant in Microsoft Word, and Peter Mandelson, the European Commissioner for trade. Could there be a connection between the recent anti-competition hearing involving Microsoft and the European Commission?

Yours,
VINCE DICKENS,

London.

Diviner inspiration

Sir,

As life-time admirers of your resplendent organ – particularly when mildly aroused – many of us here in Jersey could not help but smile at the spin you put on the George Langlois Water Diviner story (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1163). Our island has been persistently plagued by "experts" being called in from the mainland at huge expense to ourselves – simply to cover the asses of our rulers and their civil servants – when, time and time again, the local man has been proved right – at minimal cost. In this case Langlois and his driller De la Haye have devoted their careers to finding deep water sources on site in outlying areas, saving farmers the massive costs of piping in mains water.

At long last we have pushed the Suits into taking up this duo's challenge of finding out whether this deep water, which has long been shown to exist, actually originates in Normandy – a mere 12 miles away at its closest point. In the event it does turn out to be "complete and utter bollocks", it will be hugely disappointing for the whole Island population. BUT, if the locals are shown to have been right after all, it will transform the island's water prospects.

We all feel it is worth spending (relative) peanuts to find out; we should have an answer by the end of August.

Incidentally, thank you for informing us about our "water crisis": as we had understood it, our current situation is more plentiful than it has been for years.

You can't always be expected to get it right!

CHRISTOPHER DAVEY,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See

"I'd really like one, but then I keep thinking how silly it will look when I grow old"

Radiating wealth?

Sir,

Letters – Gavin Bishop, Eye 1162.

*One cannot deny Mr Bishop's thinking but does he realise that every one of the new nuclear stations will be built by foreign companies? Not **one** of the construction companies will be British.*

Thus capital will flow out of the country followed by interest or dividend payments.

Whither Britain?

Yours sincerely,
(MISS) ROSE COAKER,

Douglas, IoM.

Coup err

Sir,

Your correspondent in Managua (Eye 1163) makes an equivalence between American and Venezuelan interference in the affairs of Nicaragua. Whilst we might all have our worries about Hugo Chavez and the "Bolivarian Revolution", it is both absurd and disingenuous to compare his actions to that of the US in this particular region. When Venezuela starts mining the ports of nations that vote the "wrong" way, arming mercenary armies that attack "soft targets" such as hospitals and peasant co-operatives, providing the intelligence all the better to locate them, and selling arms to Middle Eastern despots to finance this operation, then you may make this comparison. Whatever Ortega's double standards may be, complaining about the interference of US ambassadors in a region where "diplomatically expressed opinions" have so often turned into the funding of death squads and coups is hardly a great fault.

Yours suitably livid,
BENJAMIN BLACKBENZ,

Great Glemham, Suffolk.

Stuck in LIFT

Sir,

I know that financial arrangements in the National Health Service can be confusing. That is perhaps why your organ has equated Local Improvement Finance Trusts (LIFTs) with other schemes under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and implied that the former are being pursued for balance sheet reasons.

First, my understanding is that the public sector got out of providing most new GP premises some time in the late 1980s or early 1990s, well before the first PFI deal in health was signed (1997). Since then specialist commercial companies have been building such premises for rent to GPs; such investment has not been on the government balance sheet.

Second, LIFTs are genuine joint ventures, in which the public sector has a combined stake in the equity of 35 percent. They enable the local health service to have a substantial slice of any profits as well as a degree of influence over development of premises.

Third, I doubt that the statement "that premises under LIFT cost several times more than standard GP premises" is based on a like for like comparison. Rightly or wrongly, expectations of and standards required for GP premises have undergone a quantum leap over the last few years (for instance as a result of Disability Discrimination Act). This is likely to be reflected in all new schemes, whoever finances or undertakes them.

*Last, LIFTs do **not** oblige centralisation of primary care. The standard specification includes three types of facility, only one of which, the Primary Care Centre, can be said to have a "centralising" effect.*

Yours faithfully,
DONALD ROY,

London SW15.

Lukealike

Sir,

Does this picture of a cowboy baddy from the 1949 Lucky Luke comic book (La Mine d'Or de Dick Digger) remind you of anyone?

ALISTAIR DABBS,

Bromley.

Thinks cabinet

Sir,

I write regarding your initial report (Eye 1163). Although the Prime Minister certainly knows what his cabinet colleagues think about an issue, it is traditionally put forward that formal votes are never held on proposals. This is presumably because the cabinet has no formal legislative powers. So, in this regard, Blair is like all of his predecessors.

Yours faithfully,
JAMES E. KING,

Via email.

Chelsy's two-year romance seems to be as strong as ever. She and Harry have been renting a secluded cottage not far from his barracks in Bovington, Dorset.

Wives and girlfriends are banned from the officers' mess at Harry's army base, where he is training to become a tank commander, so they have been paying £1,500 a week for the four-bedroom hideaway in the hamlet of Shaggs.

Hello! magazine

Worm turned

Sir,

Shortly after Bookworm slated Jilly Cooper's "Wicked", RGJ held his pen like a knife and cut one of Ms Cooper's jokes into Eye 1162 (page 16).

Perhaps Bookworm thought his readers had all been put off reading "Wicked" by the dreadful review, so we would not notice this breach of etiquette.

It was a funny book, by the way.

Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,
A. GALLEY,

Edgbaston, W. Midlands.

Sir,

Bookworm has not detected an error by Peter Carey. "Almond-eyed" refers to the shape, not the colour.

Regards,
DAVID BLAKEY,

Auckland, New Zealand.

Cornwall calling

Sir,

J.E. Maurice has got it wrong. Dolly Pentreath only spoke Cornish, she had no English. John Davey was bilingual. On his gravestone in Zennor Churchyard it states that he was the last person to have a "considerable knowledge" of the Cornish language. Dolly was the last Cornish (only) speaker.

Yours faithfully,
COLIN HERRING,

Zennor, Cornwall.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"It goes without saying that the egg timer is slipping away."
JOHN INVERDALE, Radio 5 Live
(Dewi Humphreys)

"Shelagh was right. It was like a dustpan out there yesterday."
BERNARD GALLACHER, Radio 5 Live
(Graeme Sharp)

"I'm a great believer that if you don't get the ball to the hole – it won't go in."
COLIN MONTGOMERIE, BBC2
(Chris Riches)

"It's throwing me in the deep end of the spotlight but we will muddle on."
NICK FALDO, BBC Sport
(Geoff Battye)

"The 16th – the only hole yesterday that Tiger gave it the big lampooning driver."
KEN BROWN, BBC2
(Ken Moxham)

SOLUTIONS

"Sock Solutions Ltd" – *socks*

"Six of the best tea-break solutions" – *mugs*

"Cob Shop: Serving Lunch Solutions for Business Clients" – *sandwiches*

"Spice Traders: The complete Takeaway Solution" – *curry*

"Bar Solutions: The complete financial solution for Barristers" – *accountants*

"Newgate Motoring Solutions for Clergy: New Purchase-Option Offer on Fiat Punto for the Diocese of Carlisle" – *ecclesiastical car finance*

All submitted by readers

Pedants' corner

Sir,

In the grand tradition of Eye correspondence from pedants correcting other pedants, it is my duty to write and inform "Ann Gevin" (Letters, Eye 1163) that Henry VIII was neither the first nor the last English monarch to be divorced, as he never actually bothered to get one. He did have two marriages annulled, but that's not quite the same thing; in fact it is the difference between the two that changed the course of history.

Yours cheerfully,
ALF TUDOR,

Via email.

Sir,

Thank you for your cartoon (Eye 1163) featuring Bluebeard's post-modern parrot.

But just a minute. It wasn't Bluebeard's parrot that used to say "Pieces of Eight"; that was Long John Silver's parrot, Capt Flint.

TONY LINCOLN,

London NW3.

Sir,

So even the Eye thinks Iranians are Arabs (The Book of Ehud, Eye 1163)? Oh dear. Perhaps we should ask George Bush to give you an ethnography lesson next time he passes through. Just for the record, Iran is an Indo-European, not a Semitic, nation, though there are significant Arab, Azeri, Armenian, Kurdish, and other minorities.

Yours etc,
DARIUS SANAI,

Via email.

Sir,

The Daily His-Torygraph (21 July) would surely have had Robin Hoodie "hanged" not "hung" from the nearest tree. However distasteful you find Canada Square politics, the Torygraph still employs literate subs. Were you perhaps confusing them with those orthographically-challenged duds at the Sherwood Grauniad?

Yours sincerely,
TIM HOPKINS,

Luton, Beds.

Sir,

That Honorary Degree Citation in Full (Eye 1163).

Billy Connolly was born in Dover St, Cranstonhill, Anderston.

JOHN KEEPER,

Via email.

Letter from **Minsk**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE coloured bunting is fading and flaccid balloons droop from doors. Yes, the celebrations are drawing to a close... and soon it won't be the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl any more.

The merrymaking was not in the streets of Minsk. Rather, the surreptitious partying was among politicians, charities and NGOs for whom the Chernobyl disaster is a great tool for propaganda and fundraising. Until the ban on journalists in 2004, Belarus crawled with photographers and TV crews looking for radioactive horror stories. With hard currency on offer, they found them. What manager of an overcrowded orphanage would turn down a "donation" from an "investigative reporter" just because none of the kids actually had radiation damage? Little Ivan's scars may be from his mother's cigarette, but who is to say they aren't plutonium burns?

Actually Belarus *does* have some of the worst child care institutions in the former Soviet bloc – decrepit, filthy, stinking places. Places full of sick, neglected, abandoned children. The international scandal of Romanian orphans shamed their government into (some) action. But so long as our regime and your Chernobyl charities blame "congenital birth defects", "immune disorders" and "brain damage" on fallout that came over the border from that Ukrainian reactor explosion, there is little incentive to improve conditions.

After one of the largest public health studies in history, the UN and WHO says the Chernobyl contamination spread over half of our country did not cause any rise in the number of such medical problems in children. They warn that anxiety and depression from the psychological state of "Chernobyl-victim" are far more hazardous than the physical injuries. But the Chernobyl hysteria industry is too valuable to your western "greens" to let facts stand in the way. The half-life of a lie is longer than that of plutonium.

A most welcome annual diversion has been the summer holidays in Europe and the US offered to more than a million Belarussian children. That is 10 percent of the entire population. Unfortunately, our president believes the youngsters return "tainted by capitalist ideas" so wants them to stay at home in future while you send him donations direct – to cut out the wasteful charity middlemen and the big bucks frittered away on bus fares, ice cream, medicine, etc.

President Lukashenko (like Vladimir Putin but taller, with a moustache and slightly less charm) embodies the Stalinist "strong-man" politics that make him popular with domestic authoritarians, European socialists and Old Labourites with a soft spot for Soviet values.

Of course Lukashenko would spend your handouts very wisely. A few years ago he presented the Russian Orthodox Patriarch with $85,000 worth of gold, silver and jewel-encrusted banners for the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. In return, Patriarch Alexis II commended Lukashenko for resisting the "cult of force, self-destruction and lack of morals that permeate the west", then decorated senior Belarus KGB men (we have not bothered to make the secret police sound more customer-friendly) with the Order of Apostle Grand Duke Vladimir (no relation) for "decisive implementation of the government's policy of spiritual development of the nation."

In March, when 20,000 people protested in the street against Lukahsneko's rigged re-election, the riot police demonstrated enviable spiritual development by a baton charge and decisively implemented a policy of shooting stun grenades into defenceless crowds. One bit of good news... the most radioactive areas of our country have been cordoned off from humans for 20 years. Far from being the sterile wasteland predicted by environmentalists, endangered species are thriving (wolves, for example). Perhaps, to replace lost Chernobyl roubles, a future source of tourism will be game-hunters from America or your Countryside Alliance for whom extensive chromosomal damage would represent a freshening-up of the gene pool.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Fifty years ago today, my husband and I quarrelled over a tiny issue, and that is why he left me," Mrs Parida told reporters north of Bhubaneshwar in Orissa state. "He said the way I cooked dhal was vile, and that he could not live with me any longer. Then he climbed up that tree and has been there ever since. Over the years, I have often pleaded with him to come down, and even threatened to hire some men to chop it down, but he stays up there, refusing all requests. I am resigned to the situation now, but the quarrel still hurts, because the dhal was my mother's recipe and it is superb."

Shouting down from his treetop retreat, eighty-three-year-old Gayadhar Parida then gave his version of events. "Things were tense with my wife back in 1956, and I had to leave. At first I climbed fifteen feet up a mango tree in our garden, and stayed there for several years, but then it collapsed in a storm, so I moved to this sturdier tree here. When I began, I often went days at a time without eating, just coming down at night to take water from our garden pond. But then neighbours began bringing food, much much better than my wife's dhal, and I now have everything I need. Being up a tree all these years has definitely helped my spiritual growth, and has brought me contentment. I would recommend it to anyone." *(Khaleej Times [India], 30/4/06. Spotter: Elphaba Oz)*

– ● –

● *"American dogs and cats produce ten million tons of faeces each year," Robert Reed of Norcal Waste told a press conference in San Francisco, "and most of it ends up in landfills, individually wrapped in plastic bags by pet owners. The city wants to reduce landfill use, and animal faeces constitute 4% of all residential waste, so they've asked us to devise a scheme to recycle it. And we've come up with a plan to heat part of the city entirely with dog poop.*

"As a pilot scheme, we'll be placing biodegradable bags and methane digester carts in Duboca Park, the city's busiest dog park. Pet owners just put the faeces into the bag, toss it into the cart, and let the bacteria inside get to work. After a week, the methane tank will be full, and the gas can be piped directly to a stove, heater, or turbine, anything that's usually powered by natural gas.

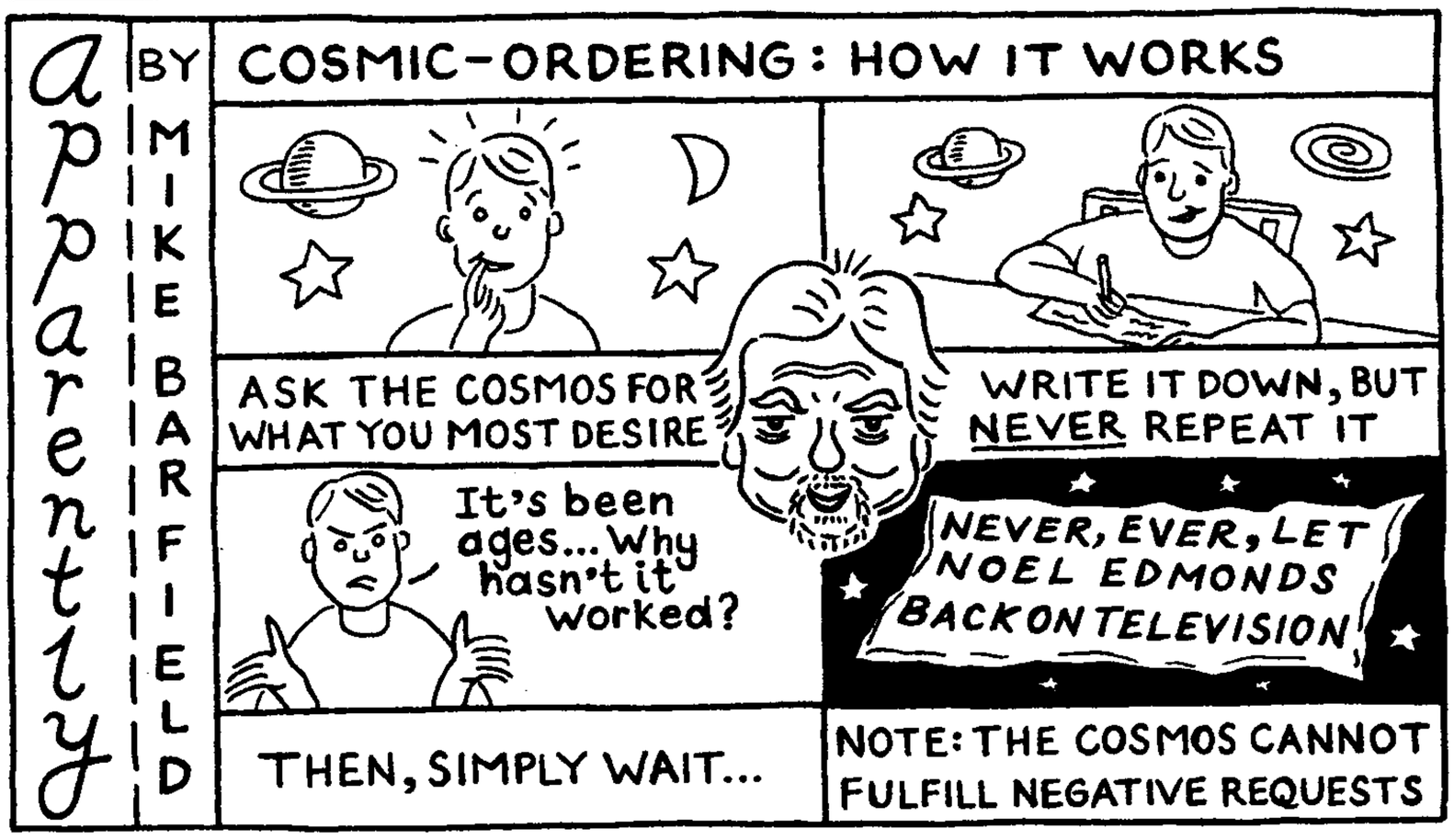
"Obviously, there could be glitches. The methane will probably contain small quantities of other gases, which will diminish its efficiency, and there are start-up costs to be considered. But the city is running out of landfill space, and energy prices keep going up, so heating homes with dog faeces makes sense. Look at the Strauss dairy farm in Marin County. It's been using dung from its own cows to power its creamery since 2000, and their system works just fine." (San Francisco Chronicle, 21/2/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

– ● –

● **Change of Employee's Gender.**

The Gender Recognition Act 2004, which enables transsexuals to register their new gender, came into force on 4 April 2005. The Act has implications for national insurance contributions and pensions. If an employee presents a full (not interim) gender recognition certificate that alters his/her national insurance position, employers will have to change to the

treatment appropriate to the new gender. For example, if an employee who is a working man over 60 but under 65 becomes registered as a woman, the employee will no longer be required to pay Class 1 contributions, but if a working woman employee over 60 and under 65 becomes registered as a man, the employee will then be required to recommence paying Class 1 contributions. There would be similar consequences in relation to state pensions, which currently become payable to women at age 60, and to men at age 65. There could also be tax and tax credit implications, but these would be dealt with by the Revenue, any change affecting employees being notified by coding adjustment. See Employer's Bulletin Issue 20 - April 2005 and information on the Revenue's website (www.hmrc.gov.uk). *(Tolley's Tax Guide 2006. Spotter D.B. Clay-Peters)*


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
COSMIC-ORDERING: HOW IT WORKS
ASK THE COSMOS FOR WHAT YOU MOST DESIRE
WRITE IT DOWN, BUT NEVER REPEAT IT
It's been ages... Why hasn't it worked?
NEVER, EVER, LET NOEL EDMONDS BACK ON TELEVISION
THEN, SIMPLY WAIT...
NOTE: THE COSMOS CANNOT FULFILL NEGATIVE REQUESTS

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Yo!

And let me quickly point out that this is not, as some people seem to think, a disrespectful form of greeting!

On the contrary, the word "yo" is a term of utmost respect and friendship, as used by the Elders of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons!

That is why, when I met my good friend the Rev Dubya at one of our top-level oecumenical get-togethers in Putingrad (formerly St Petersburg), he went out of his way to use this ancient form of greeting which indicated an equality between brother and brother.

Actually, if you want to know, the word "yo" goes all the way back to one of the noblest of all the Native American tribes, the Iraquois.

This was their ceremonial greeting, used only by the chief of the tribe, Talking Bull, when he was visited by a very important fellow-chief whom he recognised as someone of equal standing to himself!

When the distinguished visitor came into his oval-shaped wigwam, Talking Bull would hail him with the words "Yo, Running Scared!" and offer him the traditional "Pipe of War".

So that's *that* one sorted out, thank you very much!

As for the rest of the conversation, which was supposed to have made me look rather foolish – well, all I can say is that you didn't hear the full conversation and how it went on after I had switched the microphone off!

So here, for the benefit of everyone, including our friend in Tesco who keeps shouting "Yo Vicar!" whenever he sees me waiting at the checkout, is a full transcript of what the Rev Dubya and I actually said to each other when we sat down to break bread with our colleague Archimandrite R.A.S. Putin.

Rev Dubya: *OK Tony, now you've switched that pesky mike off, I can tell you what I really think of you! I really respect and value your advice – more than any*

other person on this old planet of ours!

Rev Blair: *Yo, Dubya, you're too kind!*

Rev Dubya: *No, seriously, ol' buddy, I can't afford to let you go to all those dangerous places in the Holy Land! Why, if anything were to happen to you, it would be like losing an arm or a leg. It would be like Thanksgiving Day without the turkey!*

Rev Blair: *Yo and double-yo to that!*

Rev Dubya: *I tell you what, Tone. We'll send Sister Condi. We can lose* **her**. *But you, my dear old buddy-boots from England-land, if you were not by my side 24/7, who would tell me what to do?*

And, hey, there was a lot more like this. But, to be honest, I'm a bit embarrassed to put it all in print.

Suffice it to say that, in the eyes of the world's most important spiritual leader, your vicar is a serious "player", and not just some pathetic hanger-on who tries to suck up by giving him presents – although I did give him a Burberry sweater, as it happens, in keeping with the ancient custom whereby one Red Indian chief would offer another a woven blanket as a mark of eternal friendship!

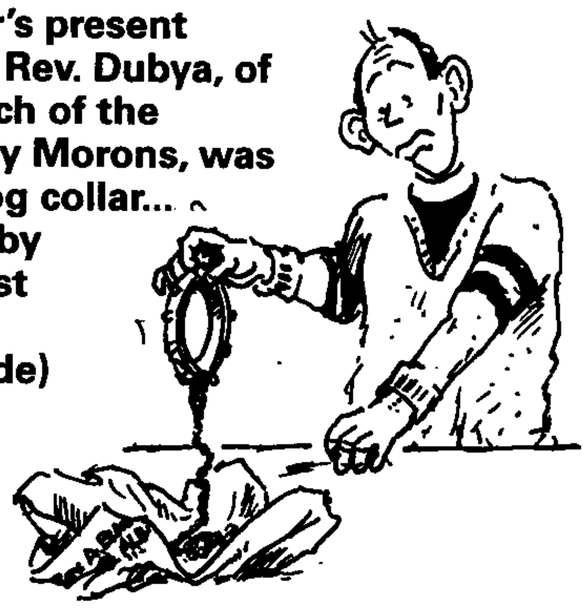
So, I hope "yo all" have now got the picture, and that we'll be hearing no more of this silly tittle-tattle that I am somehow just the Rev Dubya's poodle, at his beck and call.

I've got to go now, as I think that's him on the phone!

Yo sincerely,

Tony

The Vicar's present from the Rev. Dubya, of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons, was a new dog collar... (as seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede)



Poetry Corner

by the Vicar

IF

If you can keep your job
Whilst all about you are
telling you to resign,
If you can ignore all criticism,
Whether from left or right,
If you can go on holiday
When things are getting tough,
Then, my son, you must be the
vicar.

This poem was written specially for the vicar's sermon to the Rupert Murdoch's Porn Again Church of Sun Worshippers in California.

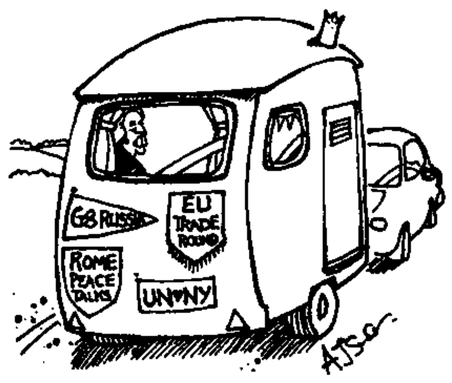
CONGRATULATIONS!!!

We are all of course overjoyed at our treasurer Mr Brown's latest "happy event" – the arrival of little Hamish McTavish Brown! A lovely Scottish name, Gordon, which I am sure will please all three Scottish members of our congregation! But it won't be easy having two small children at such an advanced age! It's certainly not the time to think about taking on any new responsibilities or changing jobs! Much better to concentrate on looking after young Hamish and his wee brother Angus, rather than spend time fretting about parish business that needn't concern you! T.B.

HOLIDAY SPECIAL

We have asked leading members of the PCC to tell us how they are planning to spend their summer holidays.

This week: **Mrs Beckett**



"Mr Beckett and I will be taking the caravan across the Channel to France. With all this terrible news about wars and crises, it will be nice to get away from it all!"

WE'RE ALL GOING ON A FREE SUMMER HOLIDAY!

You all know that my favourite holiday resort is Cliff Richard's villa in Barbados. But I bet you didn't know that St Albion's most famous ex-chorister could soon be living in abject luxury, simply due to a silly law about the copyright of his wonderful records that have given people so much pleasure over the years. Can you believe it?

Please help by joining the vicar's petition to save poor Cliff. Just sign below and make sure this "Bachelor Boy" has a "Living Wage"!! T.B.

I think Sir Cliff should be given a peerage

Signed.....

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Straw, who has been very rude about Mrs Beckett's mission to the Holy Land. We pray that Mr Straw may not be consumed by bitterness and envy of Mrs Beckett, who got his old job at the PCC, and may come to realise that he was really useless and had to be sacked. May Mr Straw's sad mental decline serve as a warning to those who disagree with the Rev. Dubya (of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons) and may his current psychological problems resolve themselves in a swift and painless death. T.B.

SCHOOLS NO LONGER TO TEACH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'RIGHT AND LEFT'

by our Education Staff G.C.S.E Failure

THERE was outrage today at a government decision to scrap the section of the National Curriculum which compels schools to teach children the difference between right and left.

However a spokesman for the ministry of education hit back at critics.

"In today's society children make up their own minds about what is so-called 'right' and what is left."

Confidence Trick

"We have moved on from the old-fashioned idea that you tell children that there is some sort of absolute distinction between these two opposing concepts. Both are equally valid."

He concluded, "As long as children are confident and secure in the *(cont. p94.)*

New Words

Incident *(n.)* large-scale massacre of innocent people, e.g. "We deeply regret this unfortunate incident" (Israeli spokesman, 2006).

Disproportionate *(adj.)* unsuitable, excessive, a bit much, e.g. "The dropping of a nuclear weapon by Israel is in no way disproportionate" (US spokesman, 2006).

Diplomacy *(n.)* not talking to people you don't like, e.g. "We are engaging in diplomacy with Syria and Iran" (Condoleezza Rice, 2006).

Advertisement

MULTI-NATIONAL PEACE-KEEPING FORCE

We are looking for volunteers from the international community to serve as peace-keepers on the border of Lebanon and Israel.

Candidates should be willing to be blown up the minute they arrive.

Apply at once to Sir Kofi Annan, c/o United Nations, New York.

IN THE COURTS

Daily Mirror vs. Dr Paul McKenna

FRCS, TTFN, DVLC, NBG

Day 94

His Honour Justice Cocklecarrot asked the plaintiff to state his occupation

Dr McKenna: I am a world famous hypnotherapist, Your Honour.

Cocklecarrot: Oh, really. And can you provide the court with some tangible proof of your qualifications in this exacting discipline? *(Sycophantic laughter bursts out from all the lawyers).*

Sir Paul McKenna *(takes out watch on chain which he swings to and fro):* Look into my eyes, look into my eyes, you are feeling very sleepy.

Justice Cockle-Edie: That is not possible, I have yet to have my luncheon *(more laughter).*

Professor McKenna: You are in my power. When I count to five you will find in my favour and award me damages.

Cocklecarrot: z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The Termination Of The BBC Television Programme *Top Of The Pops*

So. Farewell
Then *Top*
Of The Pops.

The BBC has
Shown the
Last ever
Programme.

Once you
Yourself were
Top of the
Pops.

But now
You have
Dropped out of
The charts.

D.J. Thribb (42)

FOR SALE

As new, 12 cases of not-very-good French wine (premier cruc) each bottle signed by Monsignor Chirac of l'Eglise de la Corruption, Paris.

Ideal for your barbecue or summer party.

Contact the vicarage, "Unwanted Gifts Offer", price 99p per bottle.
Buyer to collect.

KIDDIES KORNER

JOKE OF THE WEEK

Q: Why isn't the vicar suffering from the heat?

A: Because he has so many fans!

Thanks Mrs Jowell for that one! T.B.

Advertisement

From August 21st, post will be priced by size as well as weight. We're changing the way we make money. This is how it will work.
Small amount of money
Large amount of money
Huge bucket of money
Delivering 1st Class profits to ourselves

Wedding of Politics and Journalism

MURDOCH MARRIES BLAIR

by Our Media Staff **Adam Bolter** and **Anji ManHunter**

MR RUPERT MURDOCH, the Australian media mogul, and Mr Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, today formalised their long-term relationship in a moving ceremony in Pebble Beach, Florida.

Mandelson's Wedding March

Both Murdoch and Blair had been married to other partners before, but there was no doubting the sincerity of their commitment this time.

Tony Blair delighted traditional-minded guests by promising to "love, honour and obey" Rupert Murdoch, whilst the proprietor of News International promised to cherish the prime minister for "as long as it was convenient before dumping him for someone else" *(Surely some mistake? No. Ed.)*

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY TO BE SCRAPPED

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE government yesterday announced that it is to abolish the ill-fated Child Support Agency, which for the past 13 years has been in charge of forcing absent parents to pay for their children's upkeep.

The CSA is to be replaced by a new body, the ACS (the Agency for Child Support), which will have responsibility for forcing absent parents to pay for their children's upkeep.

The CSA's 8,000 employees will all be transferred to the new agency.

Said a spokesman, "This is a radical new departure for the government. We have had the courage to admit that the CSA has been a complete disaster, but we are confident that we can rectify things by reassigning all their responsibilities to the new agency.

"What's really important," he went on, "is that none of the staff should be given the SAC."

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

Oh, dear, what can the
matter be?
Johnny has gone to a City
Academy,
Now we find they're not
all they're cracked up to
be,
But the results for 14-year
olds are improving
Faster than in other
schools facing similar
problems

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

A Handy Guide For Israeli Soldiers

THE UN	HEZBOLLAH
Brings humanitarian aid to region	Brings rocket launchers to region
Helps those caught up in terror	A terrorist organisation
Determined to find a peaceful solution	Determined to bomb Israel to smithereens
Hated by US and targeted by Israeli rockets	Hated by US and targeted by Israeli rockets

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

A Handy Guide For Hezbollah Rioters

THE UN	THE US
Brings humanitarian aid to region	The big country with the famous flag and *(That's enough. Ed.)*
Helps those caught up in terror	
Determined to find a peaceful solution	
Hated by US and targeted by Israeli rockets	

THAT DECLARATION FROM THE MEETING OF FOREIGN MINISTERS IN ROME IN FULL

Israel should exercise the utmost restraint.
Unless it doesn't want to.
Er...
That's it.

"'Ere, Harold, where did you get this roadmap?"

The Book of Ehud

Chapter 94: *The Smighty Warriors Go Forth*

1. And lo, it came to pass that Ehud sent the mighty warriors of Israel, the sons and even the daughters of Israel, indeed all the children of Israel who could carry a sword or ride in an chariot of iron, into the land of Le-ban-on.
2. And Ehud spake unto the children of Israel in this wise: O children of Israel, the time hath come for the smiting that will end all smiting.
3. For too many years the Hez-boll-ites have been an thorn in our flesh, like unto the scorpion that creepeth up in the night and stingeth a man in his foot, yea, even before he can lay his hand upon the flip-flop beneath his bed in order to smite it dead.
4. Talking of which, Ehud concluded, it is time for some serious smiting, even the final day of reckoning with the Hez-boll-ites.
5. Ye are to go into the land of the cedars of Lib-anus and smite all that moveth – not just the Hez-boll-ites but also the Leb-anites (who may be no friends to the Hez-boll-ites but that is just the luck that is called tough) and indeed anyone else who getteth in our way.
6. And the children of Israel saith unto themselves, yea, it will all be over in seven days.
7. And it will be like unto an piece of cake.
8. So the warriors of Israel went forth into the land of Leb-an-on to do as they had been commanded by Ehud, the son of Sharon.
9. But, lo, it was not as it had been foretold by Ehud.
10. For the Hez-boll-ites had hidden themselves privily, in caves and holes in the ground, like unto the cunning fox which concealeth itself by day and, when night comes, jumpeth out and fireth an rocket at Haifa.
11. And so it was with the Hez-boll-ites. And the children of Israel found themselves on the receiving end of the smiting, for an change.
12. And in the streets of Haifa there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth.
13. For many had been slain, even men, women and children.
14. Though not as many as the Leb-anites, men, women and children, who had been slain by the sons of Israel.
15. And so it continueth for six days. And on the seventh day Ehud looked upon what he had done and said, "This is not good."
16. And he cried aloud, cursing the Hez-boll-ites with an mighty curse, saying, "This goeth not according to plan.
17. "So now it is time for the plan that is called B – that is to say more smiting."
18. And where Ehud had smote an hundred-fold, he now smote an thousand-fold, even the cities of Tyre and Sidon, and many others too numerous to mention (but they are all named in the Bible).
19. And among those who were smitten were the sons of Un, who are called the makers of peace.
20. But, lo, the Hez-boll-ites were still there, like unto the nettle of the desert which, the more it is cut down, the more it groweth up to sting again.
21. And the children of Israel muttereth among themselves, saying, "Verily this Ehud hath been put to the test and hath been found sorely wanting.
22. "For even Sharon, who sleepeth like unto one who is dead, would make a better fist of it."
23. And Ehud took counsel with himself, asking what he should now do.
24. What, he asketh, would Sharon have done if he were standing in my shoes?
25. And the answer cometh to him as follows: "I know – all that is needed is more smiting."

Chapter 95: *The Miracle at Qana*

1. And lo, it came to pass that in the town of Qana which is in Galilee there were many Leban-ites, women and children, gathered together in one dwelling, for they had taken refuge there and they were sore afraid..
2. And they had good reason.
3. For Ehud sent out his flying weapons by night and smote them all, even as they slept.
4. And all the children of Israel were amazed and cried out, "Verily, this is the Miracle at Qana. Ehud hath turned living people into dead ones."

(Continued until the end of the world)

WHITE HOUSE RESPONDS TO BECKETT

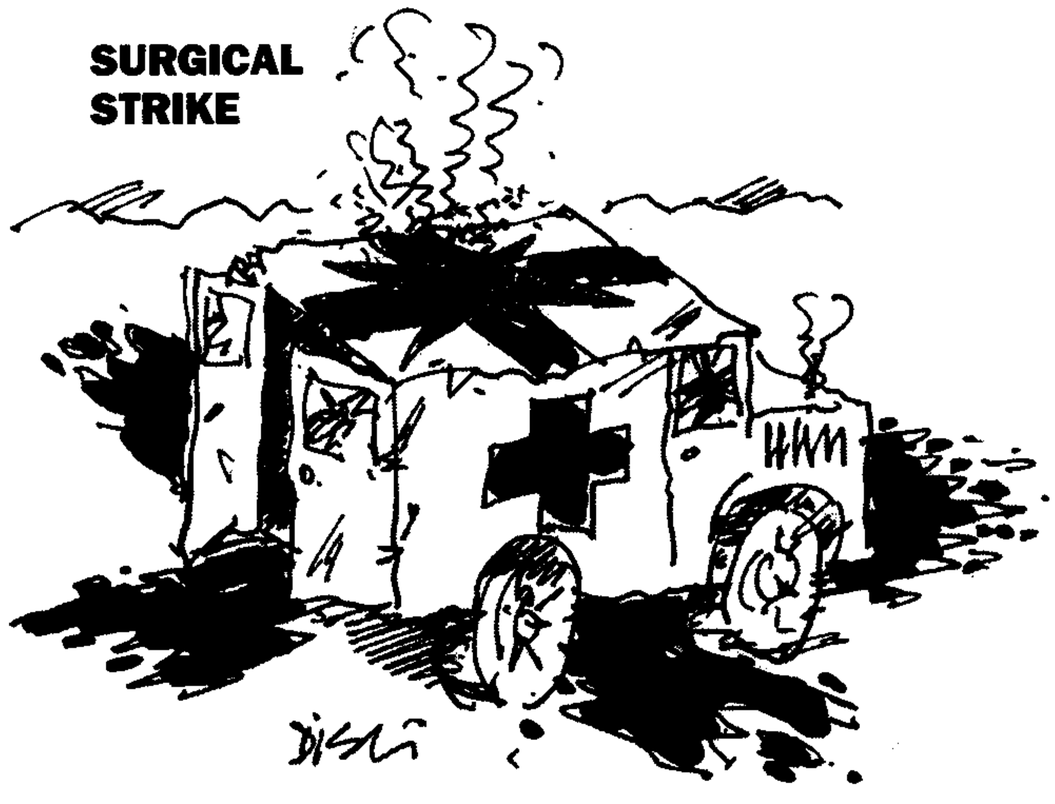
by Our Washington Correspondent **Carrie Vann**

THE WHITE House says it takes very seriously comments by the Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett criticising the use of Prestwick airport in Glasgow as a staging point for shipments of laser-guided bombs to Israel.

"We, of course, are very disappointed by the Foreign Secretary's comments," said a White House spokesman, "as we thought, after we got rid of Jack Straw, we'd made it abundantly clear that we won't tolerate British foreign secretaries stepping out of line and criticising us.

"This means we now have to go through the whole tedious process of choosing a new foreign secretary known to have a good working relationship with Americans, which means we're almost certain to have to settle for John Prescott."

Margaret Beckett is 20 (miles an hour)



Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, *Heir of Sorrows*, and *Born To Be Queen Consort*.

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles has decided to make some household economies in the interests of combating global warming.

Now read on...

CHARLES was emptying the last of his carefully saved bath water onto his organic purple nanciastors.

"There you go, little fellows. Daddy's giving you a nice, long drink and helping to save the planet at the same time."

The July sun was beating down mercilessly on the parched lawns and herbacious borders of Highgrove.

Charles took off his battered panama hat and fanned his sweating brow.

He called across to Camilla, who was sheltering under a giant-leaved burberry tree, as she struggled to complete the Quick Sudoku puzzle in the Daily Express.

"I've never known it as hot as this," he gasped. "It's this whole fossil fuel thingie. We've all got to play our part in reducing our carbon footprint. Did you know that..."

Camilla frowned, as Charles appeared to be embarking on what had become a familiar theme of their conversations.

"Chazza, can't you see I'm trying to concentrate here. Damn, I've got two fives in one row, and it's all your fault."

It wasn't just the roses that were wilting in the unaccustomed heat.

Camilla felt her own thermometer rising near the top of the scale, yet Charles seemed oblivious.

"You don't seem to understand, Cammers, old girl, this really is the most important issue thingie confronting the human race. I mean, every one of us has got to make cut-backs."

An exhausted squirrel fell out of the tree above his head, and dragged itself into a nearby dubya bush.

"You see, this whole Gaia thingie is going to collapse unless we do something pretty drastic – and I've been looking through the accounts with Sir Alan, and there's a bit of a question mark over your house."

Camilla threw down her newspaper.

"Oh, bugger it, Chazza, that's four fives in a row you've made me do now."

Camilla tore herself away from her beloved Sudoku, and focused her attention on what her husband had just been saying. What was that about her house, her beloved retreat, nestling in the sleepy Wiltshire Weald?

"You see," said Charles, pouring out a glass of fresh, warm rainwater for himself from a traditional-style plastic water butt, "we've got a lot of houses – Highgrove, Clarence House, that one in Scotland... Dunthingie, not to mention all mater's houses.

"When you think how much electricity they all use, you know, millions of kilo-thingies, we've really got to start economising somewhere – and your house is the obvious one to begin with."

Camilla bristled. "Why *my* house? Why not one of *your* ghastly piles? All those huge, dark rooms, full of stags' heads and paintings of your dreary relatives.

"And your granny's place is a nightmare. Open any of the cupboards and a load of empty gin bottles fall out on your head."

"Now hang on," Charles interrupted, his face reddening with anger.

"That's no way to talk about Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. I mean, you are a full member of the Royal Family now. There is a sort of, you know, dignity that goes with..."

At that moment the peace of the garden was shattered by the screaming brakes of the Royal People Carrier, as Prince Harry arrived back with 17 of his scantily-clad friends from an evening's dancing and dining at Slappers in Tetbury.

"It's alright," he reassured his companions, as they fell out of the vehicle and stumbled across the flower beds, "Dad's got stacks of booze in the cellar. Follow me, guys, and we'll get stuck in!"

"Cool!" chorused his friends enthusiastically, as the convivial party disappeared into the recesses of the house. Charles, meanwhile, resumed his dissertation on the perils of global warming and the need to conserve energy supplies. "As I was saying, you never turn off the lights and..."

But he might as well have conserved his own energy.

For, as he spoke, Camilla was already at the wheel of her Materazzi Convertible, accelerating down the drive, the wind in her hair and her spirits soaring in line with the speedometer.

Highgrove was behind her and the road ahead stretched towards Little Bedding, her cherished Wiltshire bolthole.

It may be just a humble little cottage, with its 14 bedrooms, swimming pool and stabling for 15 horses. But it was hers, hers, hers... and no one, but no one, was going to take it from her.

© The Sylvie Krin, 'Stansted Airport Departure Lounge Collection'.

Exclusive to the Mail and Express

PRINCESS DIANA KILLED DAVID KELLY

DRAMATIC new evidence has come to light that Princess Diana almost certainly murdered Dr David Kelly, who was found dead in an Oxfordshire wood three years ago.

It is now widely accepted that Princess Diana faked her death in a car crash in Paris in August 1997 – otherwise she couldn't possibly have killed David Kelly some six years later.

Dr David Kelly's last name was 'Kelly'. Diana was often seen on the telly. The two words are almost identical. Coincidence?

Princess Diana had an affair with James Hewitt. James Hewitt later appeared on the reality TV programme *The Games* on Channel 4. A drama about Dr David Kelly's death was also screened on Channel 4. This cannot merely be put down to "coincidence".

Dr David Kelly was found slumped against a tree. And, as a member of the Royal family, Diana was regularly photographed at tree-planting ceremonies.

Surely now we should call for a public enquiry into specious articles made up to fill the paper *(surely 'an enquiry into their deaths'? Ed)*.

There's Nothing Wrong With Lads Mags

by Former Editor of 'Huge Jugs' SEBASTIAN BLOKEY

HOW dare Labour MP Claire Curtis-Thomas suggest that lads mags should be placed on the top shelf in newsagents as they are little more than pornography?

Surely she can see that "lads mags" differ significantly from "porn mags" because they have an incredible sense of humour.

For instance, I once accompanied a picture of two topless women licking ice cream off each other's breasts with the caption "Just one more Horn-etto!". No doubt Clare-sad-old-lesbian must be one of those bunny boilers with far too much facial hair and an arse the size of the back end of a bus, to appreciate "lads mags" sly and subversive sense of humour.

Far from being porn, "lads mags" in fact celebrate women with breasts of all shapes and sizes... as long as the hooters in question are flipping enormous.

"Hi! I'm on everyone's nerves"

BRITAIN IS NOW 'HOTTER THAN THE SURFACE OF THE SUN'

by Our Credulous Correspondent **A.A. Gullible**

"BRITAIN is now hotter than the surface of the sun," bored scientists claimed yesterday.

"It's true," said one boffin, stifling giggles. "We've tested it and everything. You can put it in your newspaper if you like, next to the one about humans being descended from rocks, disco-dancing bees, and how cheese makes you invisible.

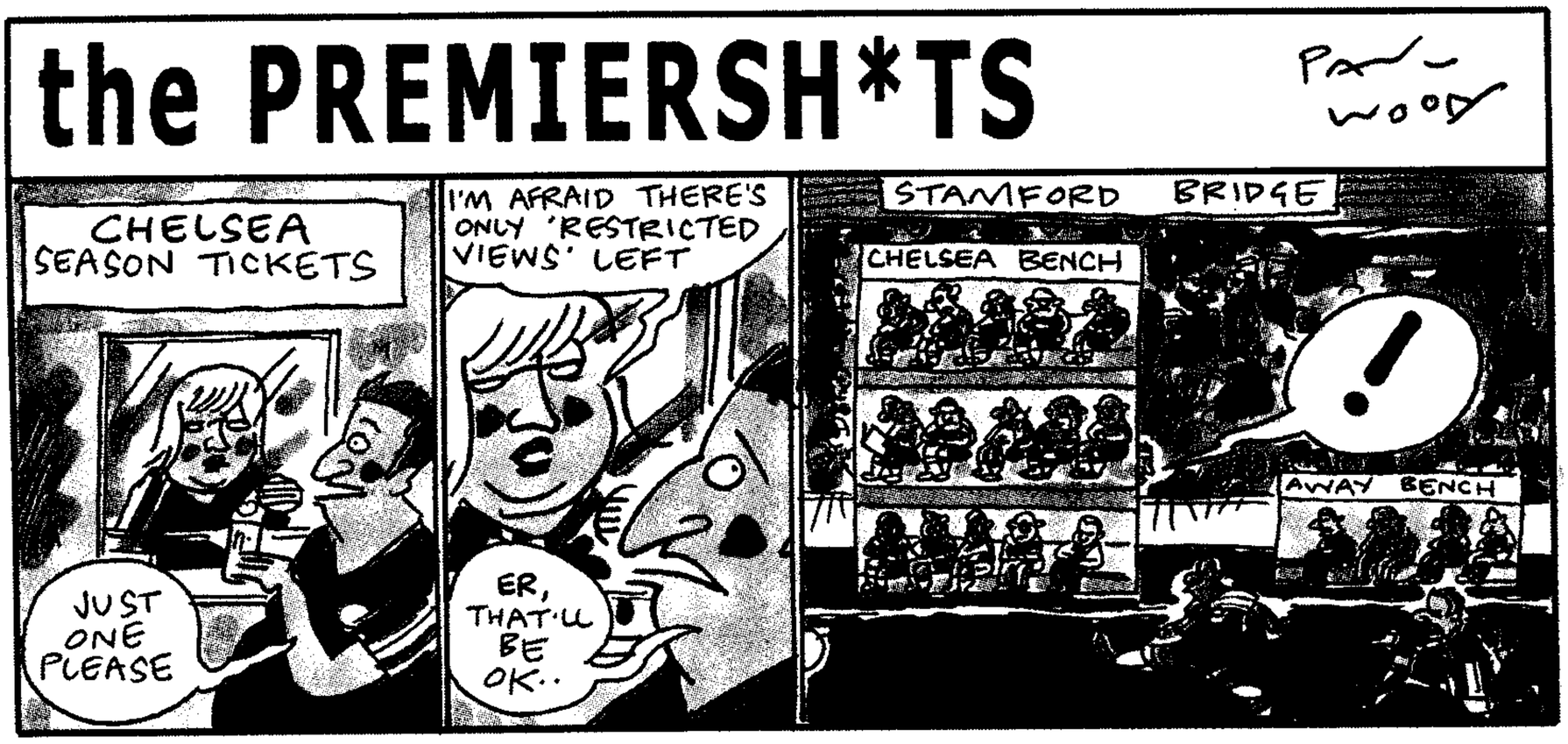
"If the current weather continues," he said, smirking, "we may have to feed you that one about dinosaurs being able to read and write."

THAT SUPER CASINO SHORTLIST IN FULL

THE GOVERNMENT has denied claims that the approved list of proposed locations for Britain's first super-casino released this week has all but assured that Philip Anschutz's Dome will emerge as the winner.

"They've all still got an equal chance to impress the panel," insisted the panel.

1. The Millennium Dome
2. Ward D, Stoke Mandeville Hospital
3 The Lebanese city of Tyre
4. Sunni shrine in Adhamiya, north Baghdad
5. Guantanamo Bay
6. The moon
(That's enough preferred locations – Ed.)



LATE HOME OFFICE NEWS

THE Home Office was rocked last night by allegations that a senior immigration official has "taken money to do his job".

"We are investigating tabloid allegations that this man went to work Monday to Friday and simply did his job," said a shocked Home Office official, "and that he didn't supplement his pay packet by taking bungs to allow illegal immigrants to buy visas.

"Even if these allegations are true, we would like to reassure the public that he is merely one ripe apple in a very rotten barrel."

DIARY

MADONNA: Life is a mystery. Everyone must stand alone. I hear you call my name. And it feels like home.

For me, those precious words sum up a profound truth about the whole life experience. Yes, it is my life's purpose to eliminate negative energy – that's, like, *un*ergy – from this planet upon which we like live on. The way to do it, you find every negative vibe and you positivise it through the power of music, so that it becomes kinda posinegitivised. That way we will heal the world. What I'm saying is like, if every single man, woman and child in the entire Middle East was to go out and buy my new Madonna CD and DVD, and, like really get into it, then there would be no more war, just like the Bible says.

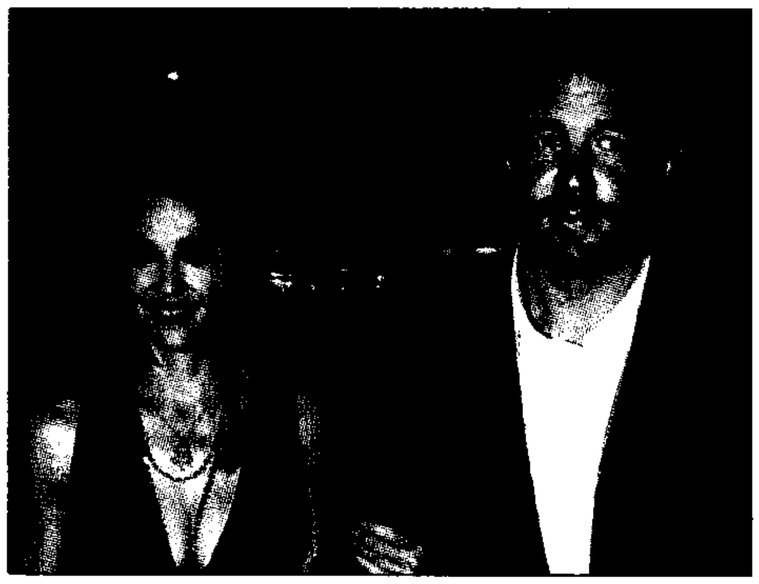
GUY RITCHIE: Good on yer, Mrs R! You got the world bang to rights there, love. Gor blimey, me old mate! Ow's about a pint? Any old iron? Any old iron? Any any any old iron?! Me? I'm just an ordinary bloke – chim-chim-inee! – but I see where you're comin' from, love! 'Ere, 'ave you ironed my shirt yet?

MADONNA: You know, sometimes I worry that eliminating negativity is, like, a negative process, I think, like, should I really be eliminating anything, I mean, doesn't negativity have a right to live and exist on this planet without, like being eliminated? But then I feel so much like love and joy and *positivity* coming from my audiences that I know I am doing the right thing. Together, we can change the world. I find it profoundly like moving that they are prepared to pay £100 a ticket and stand in the rain for six hours and buy a souvenir programme for £12 in order to bring about world peace. Let us now all stand and say a prayer to the God within each of us. Amen.

GUY RITCHIE: While you're on your feet, Mrs R, fetch us another pint, there's my girl! Lubbly jubbly, old girl! That's what I call a perfect pint! Good luck will rub awf when I shakes 'ands wiv you, and no mistake!

♦ ♦ ♦

MADONNA: Can I really make a difference? That's what I like wonder to myself when I put on my diamond bustier and have my assistants oil my buttocks before each and every show. Can I really make a difference to the world in which we like live by starting my show by standing with my legs astride this giant gold phallus with a 90-ft purple crucifix in the



MADONNA AND GUY RITCHIE

background and singing my latest hit song, 'What Is The Like Meaning of This Life?' ?

"Look around, everywhere you go
All you need's a bit of class!
To bring this world some peace and love
You need the firmest tits and ass!"

CHORUS: The only way I'm gonna eliminate
All this war and hurt!
Is to move my butt!
So it's smooth and pert!

The Book of Revelations tells us that the answer to that question is a profound yes. Amen.

GUY RITCHIE: Lor' luvaduck! There she goes again! AMEN, indeed! The missus is always goin' awn abaht MEN, intcha, Mrs R?! That's the old trouble-and-strife for yer! Women – you can't live with 'em, and you can't live without 'em, know what I mean, guv?! Darn at the old bull and bush-bush-bush!

♦ ♦ ♦

MADONNA: Every night before we like go onstage me and my boys and girls we all gather round in a circle and we close our eyes and we meditate and look into ourselves and we speak to the zone within us all and we tap into one another, and we channel our energies and we tap into the cosmic force, and I say a prayer which goes something like this:

"We are all like gathered here tonight to serve a higher purpose, to channel the spiritual energy of the universe into making this show a like meaningful experience and to show humanity a path out of the darkness and into the light. That is why our superb male dancers are dressed in leather hotpants with chains. That is why our truly profound female dancers are dressed as nuns but with their breasts bared, to symbolise the inner soul, and sharp high heels, to symbolise the nails on the cross of Christ. And that is why our movie backdrop will be like showing photographs of starving children in Africa and lap-dancers in Brooklyn and then back to my cleavage while I perform my moving plea to humanity, 'Show Me You're a Man Oh Yeah Baby (Make Me Squeal)'.

So let's make this world a better place and go fucking kick ass and have a great, great show! Amen."

GUY RITCHIE: Two fat ladies, eighty-eight! Tell you what, mate, 'er indoors and me 'ad a bit of a barney last night, I cin tell yer! Blimey, oh Reilly! You can say that again! Chim-chim-inee, chim-chim-inee, chim-chim-cher-eee! I think we can get another pint darn our old potatoes, don't you, mate? Cor blimey, I don't 'alf fancy a red-hot biryani washed darn with fifteen pints of ice-cold lager!

MADONNA: My husband is like such a real man! Like he loves swearing and taking off his clothes and wrestling other men, then showering with them, just like real men do! You know what, I thank God every day that I'm married to a man who knows what it's like for a woman to have the courage to walk onstage every night into a war-zone and fight her damnedest for the cause of humanity. Right, Guy?

GUY RITCHIE: What you on abaht? Cor, the old trouble-'n'-strife, she don't 'alf go awn! Tie me kangaroo darn, sport!

♦ ♦ ♦

MADONNA: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, Madonna will always be with you, she will wipe every tear from your eyes, she will mop your brow and salve your pain and then she will simulate intercourse with a crucifix.

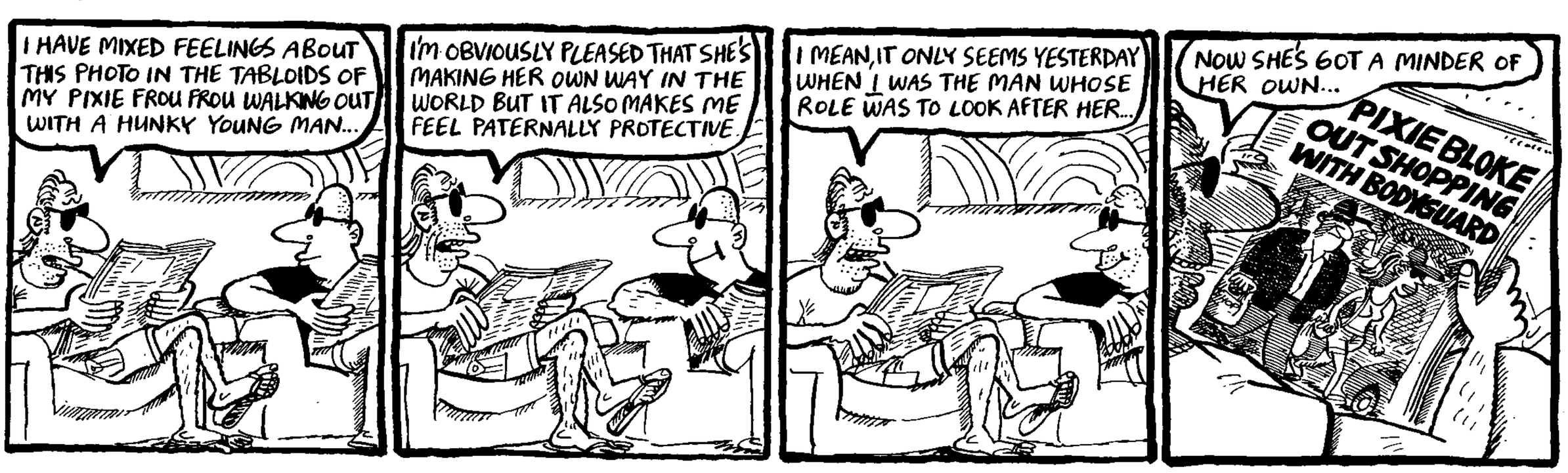
GUY RITCHIE: Sarnds all righ' to me, missus! Roll out the barrel! Doin' the Lambeth Walk! Right said Fred! Cor, it's bleedin' brass monkeys out there!

MADONNA: Pooh. This corset's really kinda stinky.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I HAVE MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THIS PHOTO IN THE TABLOIDS OF MY PIXIE FROU FROU WALKING OUT WITH A HUNKY YOUNG MAN...
I'M OBVIOUSLY PLEASED THAT SHE'S MAKING HER OWN WAY IN THE WORLD BUT IT ALSO MAKES ME FEEL PATERNALLY PROTECTIVE
I MEAN, IT ONLY SEEMS YESTERDAY WHEN I WAS THE MAN WHOSE ROLE WAS TO LOOK AFTER HER...
NOW SHE'S GOT A MINDER OF HER OWN...
PIXIE BLOKE OUT SHOPPING WITH BODYGUARD

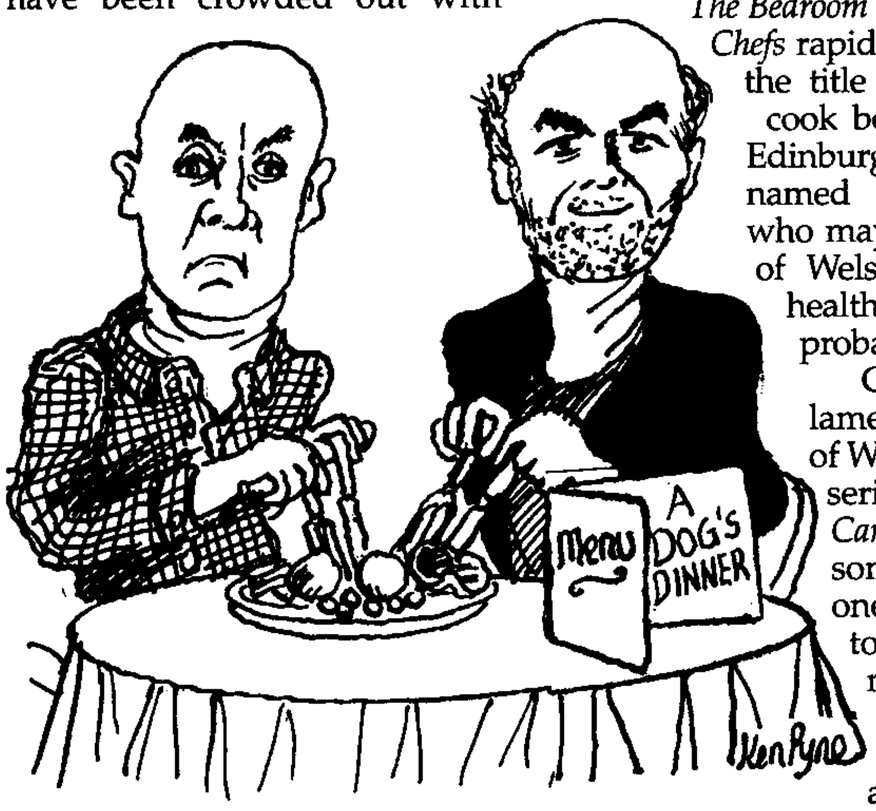
Literary Review 1

Flat du jour

Heat
Bill Buford
(Cape, £17.99)

The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs
Irvine Welsh
(Cape, £10.99)

OF ALL the prize bores so regularly paraded for the inspection of the 21st century connoisseur, there is none like the high-brow foodie bore. Ever since Elizabeth David gave the green light to chuntering on about meat and two veg in a vaguely intellectual manner – Proust and his madeleine, Manzoni and his polenta – the lanes have been crowded out with



writerly food buffs from Cyril Connolly to Julian Barnes.

Mr Buford here – former *Granta* frontman, impresario of "Dirty Realism" and *New Yorker* staffer – has the edge on these twittering amateurs: rather than write restaurant columns or sashay around the kitchen at home in a chef's bonnet, he wants to descend to the coal-face itself, stand before a Manhattan grill with the hot fat searing his face and see a bit of culinary life, don't you know?

It's a measure of how seriously literary life has degenerated, of course, that supposedly serious people feel compelled to do these things. In the 19th century, a writer might spend two years before the mast in search of his material. Now, alas, he drones through two years in a three-star Manhattan celeb-foxhole named Babbo, monitoring its gourmet hooligan proprietor Mario Batali ("a Falstaffian figure of voracious appetites", as the blurb courteously phrases it) with the most agonised deference – as if an overpaid cook was somehow important – and, later on, making pasta halfway up an Italian hillside and chopping up pigs with Dario in Tuscany.

No doubt about it, though, quite a lot of *Heat* (lavishly acclaimed by all Buford's old mates in the English papers) is moderately amusing. The humour, alas, is more or less unconscious – Bill serially cocking up in the course of his apprenticeships, or, even better, not realising that the beetle-browed intentness that attends these tasks is, in itself, extremely funny. A grown man worrying so much about how you carve up a duck? I mean, this is *hilarious*.

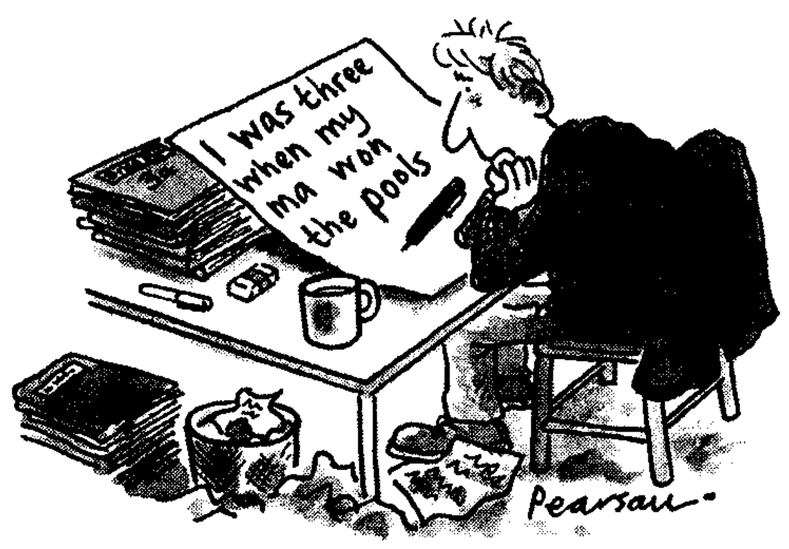
It would be perfectly possible to criticise the 300 densely written pages that follow on moral grounds – half the world starving while Beardie Bill cosies up to amiable gluttons avid to drive four hours in search of the perfect ravioli. Much easier, though, is to criticise it for aesthetic naffness.

Only in the bits that Buford picks up almost by accident – restaurant protocols, the weird jargon of the orders – does this have the faintest interest. Over in vomit-splashed Scotland, on the other hand, Mr Welsh is treading oddly tangential ground. *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* rapidly declares itself as the title of an aphrodisiac cook book penned by an Edinburgh plate arranger named Alan De Freitas, who may just be the father of Welsh's environmental health inspector hero, but probably isn't.

Critics have been lamenting the decline of Welsh's novels into a series of variations on *Carry On in Leith* for some time and this one sticks resolutely to the template: nasty sex, punch-ups and monster hangovers irradiated by odd flashes of Scots literary erudition. What mars it, as ever, is Welsh's inability to harmonise the contending elements of his style, which, in consequence, veers from thug patois ("Ginger cunt! Ah asked ye, what fuckin team dae ye support?" etc) to seemly cliché ("She had showed few overt signs of their father's illness affecting her. But of course it must, after all she was his favourite, he ruefully concluded") from one sentence to the next. "It was seldom that anything of note occurred" Welsh remarks at one point, sounding more like *Cranford*-era Mrs Gaskell than the radgy party animal of the mid-1990s.

Curiously enough, though, both Bill and Irv here – or at any rate Irv's characters – are zealously in pursuit of the same end, which is the gratification of appetite whatever the impediments placed in your way. Forget all that Wilde-era queening around or the antics of the *Vile Bodies* crowd – this is real decadence.

First Drafts



Frank McCourt

Books & Bookmen

■ IS there anything Nicholas Coleridge won't do to promote his novel *A Much Married Man*?

Not content with innumerable puff-pieces and reviews in mags owned by Condé Nast (managing director: N. Coleridge), he sent his chauffeur and secretary out on an expedition one morning to buy dozens of copies from specified bookshops – the ones the London *Evening Standard* monitors when compiling its bestseller list.

Sure enough, for one week only, his novel duly popped up at number three in the list, thus enabling the publishers to bill it as a "top 10 bestseller" when the paperback comes out. The secretary claimed back the cost on expenses – which, as her boss, Coleridge was delighted to authorise.

But what about all the books? Coleridge sent them out as gifts to everyone who advertises with Condé Nast magazines – thus managing to achieve two self-promotional stunts for the price of one.

■ SO THE supermarkets' favourite thriller writer James Patterson has been poached from Headline by Random House. This is quite a coup for CEO Gail Rebuck, who recently conceded the number one publisher position to the ever-growing Hachette Group which itself owns, wait for it, Headline.

Patterson is seen as a one-man publishing industry, writing bestselling hardback and paperback thrillers, as well as romances and children's books. He was the fifth biggest selling adult fiction writer in the UK in 2005 which perhaps gives a clue as to why he has jumped ship.

Two years ago Headline announced the largest ever marketing spend in UK publishing history, supposedly in the millions and with a contribution from the author himself, to make Patterson the number **one** novelist in the country. After what many said was an act of hubris, Patterson obviously feels let down and decided that he is going to take his books elsewhere.

■ LAST Sunday's *Observer* offered plenty of cheer for Penguin – a main review hailing a Viking biography that brings John Donne "brilliantly to life", followed by an interview with Puffin children's author Meg Rosoff. But other publishers are less happy. They point out that Penguin books have had a good whack of the lead reviews in recent issues (4 out of the last 7) and lit ed Robert McCrum has himself written three reviews of books from the group including a full-page promo for the latest "enthralling" effort by Stakhanovite Shakespearian Stanley Wells. These disgruntled publishers used to accuse McCrummy of cheerleading for Faber because he was a Faber author. Now of course the distinguished biographer of P.G. Wodehouse is… er… a Penguin author!

'Bookworm'

Young British Artists

The Stuckists are just jealous of our cosy relationship with the Art Establishment.
TATE CRITICISED FOR BUYING WORK OF ARTIST-TRUSTEES
STUCKISTS UNCOVER SHADY DEALS
CHRIS OFILI THE UPPER ROOM
Er–not that we have one!
TATE CRIT FOR BU OF ART

More Literary Review ➡

Literary Review 2

Wallow on leather

Bearders: My Life in Cricket
Bill Frindall
(Orion, £18.99)

NOT a lot changes in sports publishing. True, the money has gone haywire, if you are a footballer, or were once a footballer, or once watched a game of football all the way to the end; but for other sports the conventions remain the same as they ever were. In cricket, for instance, you can only hope to get your book published if it falls within certain narrow specifications. There's the old sweat's tour diary; there's the chucklesome little handbook explaining the game to confused foreigners (and women! guffaw!); there's Wisden, the mighty and marvellous almanack, and millions of slightly sad spin-offs, never quite as good; there are the ghosted autobiographies, full of nicknames; and there are the few rare and precious unghosted ones, which usually turn out to be auditions for post-retirement jobs on the *Daily Telegraph*.

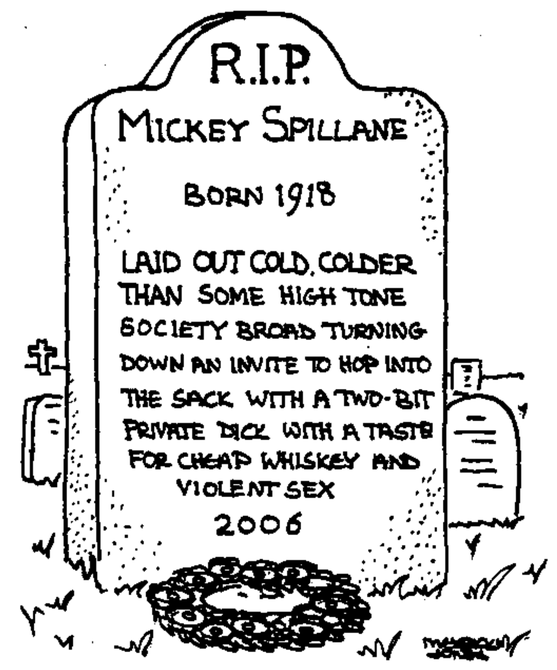
But by far the most dispiriting of these sub-genres is the *Test Match Special* spin-off. The notorious cake-crazed glee club has been on air now since slightly before radio was invented, but its hold on the publishing world has been vice-like since the astonishing success of almost any book with a picture of Brian Johnston on it in the early 1990s. Since then every commentator who could still stand unaided has had his book(s) published.

Don Mosey's *The Alderman's Tale* was so bad tempered it ended his career, while Henry Blofeld's many, many books – generally "What I Did On My Holidays" in a bow-tie – have consistently extended what was deemed possible in the related fields of boasting and self-indulgence. The *Test Match Special* effect was then extended to include other cricketing national treasures, such as Dickie Bird, whose increasingly desperate books sold even more than Johnston's. And because these books still do well, the bubble hasn't burst so much as been reinforced with steel and concrete. There appear to be no depths these publishers won't plumb.

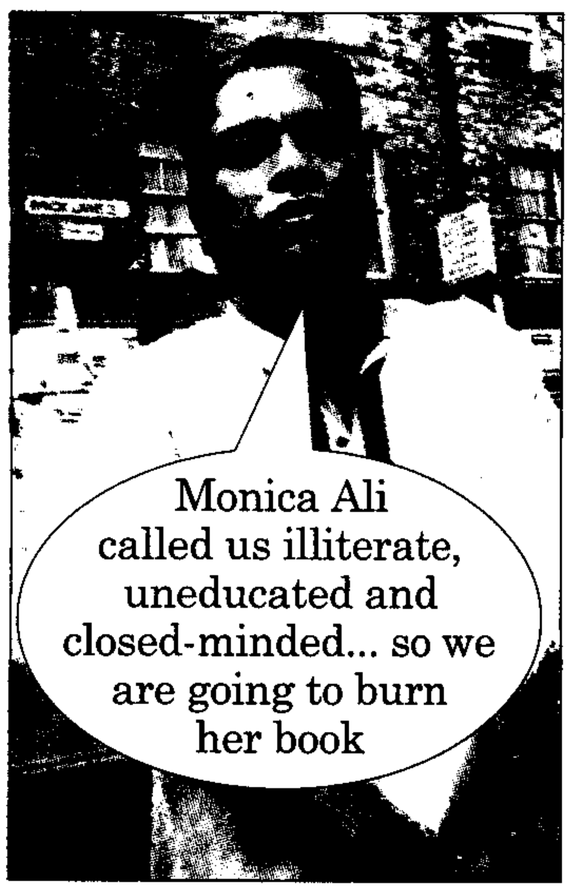
As is born out by *Bearders*, the autobiography of the team's scorer, the man whose greatest claim to fame is that successive generations of cakesters have used him as their willing stooge. In 300 agonising but beautifully printed pages, we learn of Frindall's early years in terrifying detail; we are taught how to score the Frindall way; we hear of his admiration for John Arlott (and the drunker the commentator, the higher he esteems them); and we read lots of oddly pointed little barbs about everyone else. It's as though Frindall can't quite see his esteemed colleagues as human, as much as he sees them as potential statistics. To record, for instance, that Graeme "Foxy" Fowler was the only *TMS* commentator or summariser to divorce his wife by fax could be considered rather hurtful if you were Graeme "Foxy" Fowler or the former Mrs Fowler, but Frindall clearly just regards this as a fascinating fact.

What's fascinating to Frindall, however, may not be that gripping to his reader. Any *TMS* neophyte opening this book at random would discover why the Bearded Wonder is kept as far away from microphones as is humanly possible: because he has almost nothing of the slightest interest to say. Unfortunately Frindall may be the only person in the world who doesn't know this. Not only does his book contain all the stories you have read before in all the other books, it has several that should be buried in peat for tens of thousands of years. There's an entire chapter on how funny it was when he impersonated an Arab during a Test match. Of almost all his colleagues he says that they are "much in demand as after-dinner speakers". If you are as drunk as he says John Arlott usually was, you might perceive this book as a masterpiece of Pooter-like parody and self-delusion. Alternatively it's one of the most boring books ever written. Or as Frindall himself would say, the eighth most boring book published in Britain since 1978, and the third most boring written by a man with a ridiculous beard.

It's not Frindall's fault, though, that he is dull. Most of us are, after all. But we have to blame Orion for indulging his delusions, almost certainly with cheques. Cricket publishing is the poorer for it, and so will anyone be who buys this unfortunate book.


R.I.P.
MICKEY SPILLANE
BORN 1918
LAID OUT COLD. COLDER THAN SOME HIGH TONE SOCIETY BROAD TURNING DOWN AN INVITE TO HOP INTO THE SACK WITH A TWO-BIT PRIVATE DICK WITH A TASTE FOR CHEAP WHISKEY AND VIOLENT SEX
2006

BRICK LANE SHOCK



LIBRARY NEWS

■ LOOK for the latest bestsellers in libraries in the London borough of Lambeth and you'll be disappointed – librarians have been told not to buy *any* new stock at all until a finance review is completed by the new Labour administration. Meanwhile the books budget has been cut from £500,000 to £360,000.

The borough's huge "Revitalise" regeneration project still proposes a new library and community one-stop-shop for Clapham, but whatever will be put in it? So much for Culture Minister David Lammy's continued claims that his party believes books are "central" to public libraries.

I remember doing a deal with the Sun a week or two after Princess Di was killed in Paris. Andy Coulson – their pop editor – called up to say he needed to lift the spirit of the nation, and that the Spice Girls were the only people who could do that. So we gave him an exclusive picture of the Girls in Baywatch bikinis and they ran it across their front page. It seemed to help people move on.

JULIAN HENRY
Observer Music Monthly

Federer on a perfectly sunny day at Wimbledon? It's best described as watching Michaelangelo's David dressed in tennis whites, with the feet of Baryshnikov, the flair for geometry of the ancient Greeks, the hands of McEnroe, all under the direction of Mozart.

RAHUL JACOB
Financial Times

Pseuds Corner

Roman Ondak's work focuses on the nature and perception of codes and conventions governing social behaviour. Previous works include *Good Feelings in Good Times* 2003, which consisted of a queue of people which formed, dispersed and then regrouped in various locations at the Frieze Art Fair in 2004. More recently a discreet performance, *Resistance 2006*, took place at the Museum for Modern Art in Vienna involving people walking around the museum with untied shoelaces.

Tate Modern programme

It would be too trite to damn [David] Beckham as a modern Richard Burton, a man whose achievements paled against the depth of the potential when he first delivered his Hamlet at the Old Vic. If Victoria is his Elizabeth Taylor, the parallels are starker still.

TIM RICH
Daily Telegraph

TUESDAY. I sat down at the piano and wrote a five-minute piece of music called *Thanks but no thanks, Gordon* – a minor protest about government plans to replace the Trident missile.

MICHAEL NYMAN's week
Daily Telegraph

Being 43 has made me a little depressed. It seems so much older than 42. My galleryist, Jay Jopling, has a little girl who said something incredibly profound once. It was on her fourth birthday...Jay said to her: 'Angelica, how is it to be four?' She looked up at him and said, sadly: 'Daddy, I can still feel the three.' Oh, how I can relate to that!

TRACY EMIN
Independent

Before meeting [Paris] Hilton, I watched *1 Night in Paris*. It could be a Pinter play with pornographic brutality thrown in for good measure.

SIMON HATTENSTONE
Guardian

CONTRIBUTORS: David Cooper, Phil Carter, Malcolm Bielby, Toby Beddoe, Philip Conford, Jonathan Guinness, Kit Ballantyne.

£10 paid for all entries

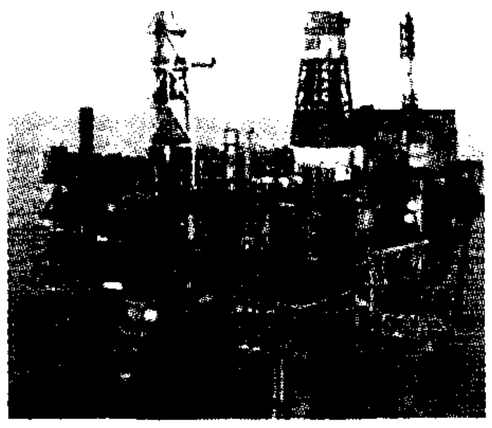
IN THE BACK

OIL RIG DEATHS

Bravo, HSE

THE fatal accident inquiry into the death of two workers on Shell's Brent Bravo platform in 2003, which reported last month, unsurprisingly lays the blame squarely at the door of the oil company. But safety campaigners remain frustrated by the inquiry's failure to probe the highly questionable role of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the tragedy.

As revealed in the *Eye* last year (1132 and 1136), six months before the deaths oil workers' unions had shown the HSE a mountainous backlog of critical maintenance work, including so-called "technowrap surveys" for checking temporary patches on leaky pipes. Failure to check one such patch played a key part in the fatal explosion which, in the Aberdeen sherriff's words, "might reasonably have been prevented if an appropriate temporary repair had been applied…"



Despite the backlogs highlighted by the unions, along with objections to Shell's proposals for money-saving changes in maintenance procedures, just three weeks before the accident the HSE told the company its cutbacks posed no "imminent risks to the health and safety of those persons working on your offshore installations on the UKCS [UK continental shelf]". Crucially, this endorsement was given after safety inspectors had visited just three of Shell's 15 platforms in the UKCS, *not* including Brent Bravo – although some of the worst maintenance arrears were on Bravo.

Now the unions want an investigation of the HSE's role, which was not covered by the latest inquiry. The HSE initially denied any failures, telling the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* that the unions' complaints only related to the platforms it visited. But, confronted by evidence that safety and maintenance across the Brent field (which includes the Bravo platform) had been questioned, the HSE eventually admitted that the complaint indeed covered "maintenance backlogs on the Brent field, though the evidence presented specifically concerned Brent Delta [another platform]".

Even this conceals the truth. The records shown to the HSE, seen by the *Eye*, clearly identify serious backlogs on Bravo – including the "technowrap survey" that should have been performed months before but wasn't, leading to the two deaths.

Workers question whether for years inspectors have been reluctant to stand up to the oil companies and use their powers to shut down unsafe installations. Amicus regional officer Graham Tran told the *Eye*: "HSE should re-think their approach to the offshore sector and be prepared to shut down operations where they find safety concerns rather relying on ineffectual 'improvement notices' – the industry needs to understand that neglecting safety will hit them where it hurts."

PS: The announcement just before the parliamentary recess of a corporate manslaughter bill will have come as a relief to firms like Shell. The bill excludes convictions for directors and, classified as a health and safety rather than criminal matter, will not be "devolved" – so the law will apply in Scotland as well. A group appointed by the Scottish Executive had agreed on a law that would have sent reckless directors to jail, but that can now be shelved.

GALLAHER TOBACCO

Hezbollah: the smoking gun?

AS THE west watched Israel pounding Lebanon's innocent civilians in its vain attempt to crush Hezbollah last week, in the quieter surroundings of the London high court lawyers for the British tobacco giant Gallaher were desperate to keep a lid on allegations that it had once enlisted the services of the Islamic militants.

Gallaher, which makes Silk Cut and Benson & Hedges cigarettes, is facing a £350m counter-claim for breach of contract from its former Middle Eastern distributor, Tlais Enterprises Limited (TEL), and its well-connected Lebanese owner, Abu Hameed.

Gallaher began the legal row by terminating TEL's distribution contract, but the whole case is becoming increasingly bitter and complex, with each accusing the other of cigarette smuggling, and TEL accusing the British company of sanctions-busting in Saddam Hussein's Iraq and dumping fags on third world markets.

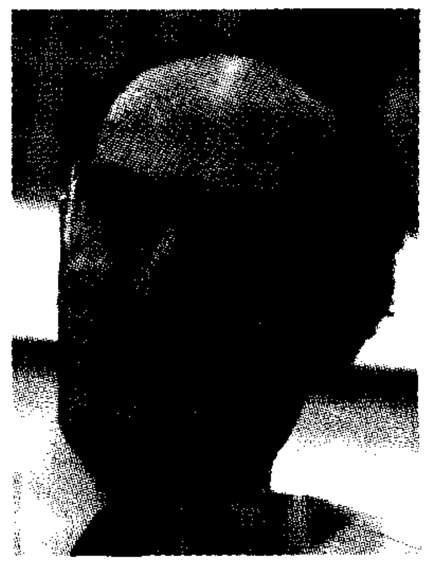
But for now Gallaher is most sensitive to any mention of the "H" word – and the accusation that in 2003 it turned to "the Party of God" to recover more than £1m of duty from the Iranian government.

TEL claims it approached the Islamic militants in Beirut on Gallaher's behalf offering a "success fee" of up to £250,000. Fortunately for all involved, it claims the deal never came off because handing money to Hezbollah's armed wing is, of course, illegal.

When the allegations first surfaced in the *Sunday Times* last February, Gallaher's finance director Mark Rolfe (pictured, right) claimed the idea had come from TEL and he said he took it as "a joke in bad taste". Not so, says the distributor's barrister, Dinos Saveriades, who attended meetings in Lebanon where he claims the approach to Hezbollah was discussed with a number of Gallaher executives, including Tom Keevil, the company lawyer.

Saveriades told the *Eye* that Gallaher, realising the sensitivity of using Hezbollah, advised against referring to it in any correspondence. From then on an abundance of letters, seen by the *Eye*, refers simply to "the group".

Keevil and Co were in court last week attempting to force the financially allusive TEL into paying some money into court in the event that it loses its £350m claim and has to pay Gallaher's rapidly mounting legal costs. Thinking there were no journalists in court, it was actually Gallaher's barrister who first mentioned the dreaded Hezbollah.



TEL's barrister preferred more oblique references to "this group that features a lot in the newspapers these days". However, when he tried to hand up a transcript from a covertly recorded video of two senior Gallaher executives apparently discussing the Hezbollah deal, the judge declined. The video has been disclosed as part of the evidence by TEL to Gallaher, which told the court that it disputed its authenticity. But here's a flavour of its contents: "The resolution of the duty issue into Iran is in the hands of Hezbollah. If Hezbollah can't do it, it probably can't be done."

Four months ago, when Deborah Arnott, of the anti-smoking group Ash, met Treasury Minister John Healey, she thought he had agreed to investigate the affair. But neither Customs nor Scotland Yard's National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit have launched any kind of investigation – which will no doubt come as a relief to the accountancy giant KPMG, which Gallaher brought in to clear up its financial mess in Iran. Given Hezbollah's role in the devastating events in the Middle East, maybe Knacker will now take an interest.

THE GREAT LAND PLOT

Mr & Missing Smith?

LAND SCAM salesman Andrew Smith has upped sticks and left 3,000 clients who paid thousands of pounds each for virtually worthless plots of land (*Eye* 1139) high and dry.

Smith's companies, United Plotowner Associates Ltd (UPA) and UK and International Land Sales and Development Limited (ILS), sold plots of agricultural land to people who were given the impression that they would be able to obtain planning permission to build new homes. Alas, as the *Eye*'s investigation last year revealed, planning permission was highly unlikely on most of the greenbelt sites. Smith's firms have now vacated their Guildford offices without leaving a forwarding address.

UPA and ILS claimed to "provide investors and the general public with a means to purchase land with a high potential for planning permission". Smith claimed his scheme offered a way for key workers to obtain affordable housing, especially in the over-heated South-east, and boasted of his talks with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

It was a good earner for Smith. UPA would buy a field with no planning permission for, say, £100,000, sub-divide it into 200 "building" plots on sale for £5,000 apiece and market them as providing potential housing for key workers. A tenfold profit for very little effort. Alas for the purchasers, councils contacted by the *Eye* made it clear that planning permission for housing was very unlikely to be granted on most of the sites concerned. One "showcase" site, at Bramber in West Sussex, is on a flood plain that is regularly under water in winter.

The UPA website still gives a contact number – but it goes through to the old offices in Parallel House, Guildford, Surrey. Staff answering the phones there do not know where Smith has gone. The ILS website has disappeared.

Still, people who are stressed out after buying worthless land from Smith might like to take a relaxing break in north Devon, at the Lenwood Sports and Country Club in Bideford, bought by Smith last year for £1.2m out of the proceeds of the UPA scam. The club was opened last October by the mayor of Bideford, John Davis, followed by a reception at which entertainment was provided by Smith's "pal", Bobby Davro. There are 62 holiday bungalows in the grounds, for sale or rent. No doubt those who missed out on the chance to purchase land from UPA will be flocking to buy.

SEE OVER ➤

ROYAL MAIL

Clash on delivery

"MAKE sure that any important letters and valuable documents that have been sent to you are in safe hands," advertises the Royal Mail's Keepsafe service, designed to look after post while you're away from home.

For £5.35 a fortnight, the Royal Mail keeps hold of your post rather than delivering it and creating a huge pile of mail on the doormat as a handy clue for burglars. "Keepsafe gives you peace of mind," it says.

For *Eye* reader Marshall Webb, Keepsafe proved an absolute nightmare. He booked the service for 66 days that he was to be out of the country, but just before returning home discovered that £6,500 had been stolen from his bank account. On contacting the bank he discovered that the money had been withdrawn using new debit cards sent to his home address while he was away – cards that should have been kept safe by Keepsafe. When he collected his post, the cards were not there.

The bank refunded the money but, armed with proof of postage from the bank, Mr Webb wrote to Royal Mail asking for it to meet the costs of dealing with the card theft and its consequences by expensive shipboard phone and to compensate him for the two days work he lost dealing with it on his return. After getting no answer, he contacted postal watchdog Postwatch. Postwatch wrote to Royal Mail and (after additional prompting, since it failed even to respond to Postwatch's first letter), the Royal Mail said it apologised for the service failure but that the service "does not provide cover against losses of a consequential nature".

Helpfully, it enclosed a special delivery leaflet, suggesting that he should "consider using this service for such items".

Mr Webb then tried to take the matter through a small claims court – but discovered that Royal Mail is indemnified by statute from having to take responsibility for such failures of its Keepsafe service.

The Royal Mail told the *Eye* that it classes Mr Webb's complaint as an item being lost in the post, rather than a "Keepsafe failure" and it does not have to pay compensation. But in the 10 months up to February, Postwatch's figures show that it dealt with 107 complaints about Keepsafe failure – and that's just the complaints of people who made the effort to pursue beyond whatever response they got from Royal Mail. So much for peace of mind.

TAX CREDIT FRAUD

Own goal

ORGANISED tax credit fraud involving the theft of thousands of people's identities and costing hundreds of millions of pounds so far (see *Eyes passim*) was made possible by the Revenue ignoring the government's own security standards for three years.

The recent National Audit Office (NAO) report on Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) latest accounts explains how in September 2002, a month after the "e-portal" for internet claims opened, the Cabinet Office's so-called e-envoy issued guidance on controls on electronic government services.

Where money is paid out and crime is a possibility (something even the Treasury admits it has known about from day one), the rules are clear that documentary evidence of identity should be demanded. But, probably in the interests of bolstering the take-up numbers for the exciting new tax credits and providing evidence to support claims of wild public enthusiasm for "e-services", the standards were ignored. HMRC now belatedly accepts that "additional controls" are needed before the e-portal can be opened again.

The NAO report also reveals the numbers of cases of "potential organised fraud" identified before anything was done about them. Although figures were only collected from the end of May 2005, they show around 700 to 800 cases every week, with one week in July alone seeing 1,500. Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo was briefed on the threat in June – yet the e-portal for claims to be made over the internet was only closed in early December after suspected organised fraud cases had consistently exceeded 1,500 for weeks. But by this stage some 62,000 claims had been made using stolen identities, 33,000 of which were successful at a cost of £55m. The total cost in payments to organised criminals in 2005/06 is estimated at £131m.

Incredibly, the evidence of thousands of cases of possible fraud every week, for months, wasn't enough to persuade Primarolo to shut the leaky portal. In June she had accepted advice (which she won't disclose) that "existing controls were sufficient to manage the threat" even though it was clear millions were being lost to organised fraud, thus inviting the theft of 30,000 civil service and Network Rail employees' identities that was shortly to follow.

No wonder "Red" Dawn refuses to answer press or parliamentary questions on the subject. The next one might be: why did she ignore the government's own security advice – not to mention the fraud staring her in the face – for so long?

BP COLOMBIA

Make my Leigh Day

MORE on BP's secret £3.2m settlement with the Colombian peasant farmers rendered destitute by the construction of an oil pipeline through their land (see last *Eye*).

It was apparently bubbly and bonuses time at Leigh Day, the London law firm which specialises in suing big multinationals whose endeavours in the developing world often offer scant protection and little regard for the poor and oppressed. For the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, which first took up the farmers' case in 2001, was concerned to learn that the lefty law firm had earned in legal fees the same amount as the fifty-plus farmers had received in compensation – that is £1.6m. There is also some disquiet that £240,000, which is to go to the farmers' original Colombian lawyer, Marta Hinestroza, is to be deducted from the farmers' pot. This means that the lawyers end up with more than their impoverished clients, some of whom are now living in a shantytown built on a rubbish dump in Medellin.

Eye readers may recall that Ms Hinestroza had to abandon the case and in 2002 was given political asylum in the UK after being targeted by the army-backed right-wing paramilitaries who unofficially protect the OCENSA pipeline, built by a BP-led consortium.

The case was taken on by Leigh Day on a no-win no-fee basis, under which the law firm risks a lot of money if it loses, but is able to double its hourly rate if successful. Asked to justify the figures, Martyn Day, senior partner, said that although he would have a great deal to say about the detail, he could not breach the confidentiality agreement he signed with BP concerning the settlement for risk of jeopardizing his clients' settlement.

However, he did not claim the figures put to him were inaccurate and said: "Let me make this point. In no case I have been involved in have I worried about the costs before I have resolved the case for my clients. In any group claim where we have negotiated a global figure, we have always worked out a fair figure for the clients and then looked at the costs position."

Of course the deal with the farmers is barely a smudge in the accounts of BP, which last week announced record £3.3bn profits for the first half of this year. After all, the settlement was less than boss Lord John Browne's £3.25m salary.

DEFENCE TRAINING

By the right... Quick, privatise

THE biggest private finance initiative deal in history, the £19bn Defence Training Review project under which training for the three armed forces will be brought together and sold off, is quietly going ahead with the barest scrutiny – even though the plan is to privatise training on everything from driving tanks to military security.

The nearest parliament has come to examining the deal was in the sleepy surroundings of Westminster Hall last month when a handful of MPs gathered for an adjournment debate on "Defence Jobs in Shropshire" – where much defence training is performed, including at RAF Cosford.

Tory member for The Wrekin Mark Pritchard, who had secured the debate, wondered "whether this country's defence privatisation has gone too far, and I say that as a Conservative". Among his concerns was the loss of expertise when training is relocated to other parts of the country and current staff, many ex-servicemen and women, decline to move with it. Yet the MoD has refused to entertain an in-house bid for the deal that the workers think could provide training more effectively and economically than the consortia of usual suspects that are lined up.

Gordon Brown's would-be challenger John McDonnell (pictured, right), chairman of the Public and Commercial Services Union parliamentary group, also pointed out the danger of creating a defence monopoly. Among the firms bidding are major suppliers BAe, QinetiQ, EDS and Babcock, many of whom have proved better over the years at making money from defence deals than supplying decent services.

In response Defence Minister Tom Watson employed a battery of management-speak to dismiss the idea of keeping defence training in public hands. "It could not have provided comparable technical innovation, performance discipline and risk transfer," he claimed – even though he won't allow such an option to be drawn up to test his theory. But he was able to promise "rationalisation", "harmonisation" and "maximum synergy" – all to be overseen by the MoD's PFI unit (run by former PwC partner Nick Prior – see last *Eye*), ably assisted by the consultancy services of, er, PwC.

The "preferred bidders" for the deal were due to be announced last month, but this has already been put off until the end of the year. At least the delay might give parliament a chance to wake up and question whether flogging off the country's defence training to the highest bidder for the next 25 years is such a great idea.

POLICE 5

Touching the Untouchables

ONE question following last week's BBC documentary into the murder of Stephen Lawrence is whether the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigation into alleged police corruption in the affair will also look at the role of Scotland Yard's anti-corruption squad, the so-called Untouchables.

Neil Putnam, the bent copper turned supergrass who told the programme that a detective in the first murder inquiry was taking money from local gangster Clifford Norris to protect his murder suspect son, David, also claims that he told exactly the same story to the Untouchables some years earlier but that no action was taken.

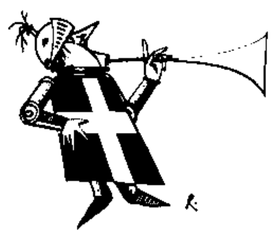
Heading the anti-corruption operation that netted Detective Constable Putnam and turned him into a supergrass in 1998 was John Yates (pictured below), now deputy assistant commissioner (DAC). Putnam's evidence was used successfully against some of his fellow officers at the East Dulwich branch of the South East Regional Crime Squad.

Putnam told the BBC that during one of his many debriefs as a supergrass he made the allegation that Det Sgt John Davidson was in the pay of Norris. Yates (now heading the cash-for-honours inquiry) told the BBC that while he considered Putnam to be a witness of truth who had faced up to his own crimes, on this occasion he was mistaken. Scotland Yard had combed its entire files and could find nothing about Putnam's claims. But that is because, contrary to rules, discussions with supergrasses were not always recorded or properly written up in notebooks – thus allegations, convenient or otherwise, could be lost and would not have to be disclosed to any defendants.

Putnam is one of four police supergrasses – the others are Duncan Hanrahan, Terry McGuinness and Kevin Garner – who have made similar allegations about the Untouchables covering up corruption, which neither the IPCC nor Knacker has investigated.

Eye readers will also remember the case of Det Con Nabeel Akhtar, who complained to the IPCC about wide-ranging corruption offences against no fewer than 17 Untouchables.

Will something now happen?



EYE TOLD YOU SO

Countryside omission

AS deputy prime minister John Prescott's career continues to nose-dive, so does the reputation of his favourite developer, Countryside Properties, whose plans to build homes on the site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory in Rochdale have been humiliatingly exposed as "seriously inadequate" by a report released last week.

The report, completed by consultants Atkins Global, cost the local council £80,000 and confirmed what the *Eye* first reported in March 2005: that the developer's claim that "of particular note is the absence of any asbestos contamination" on the 72-acre site, was rubbish.

Atkins said: "Asbestos disposal is understood to have taken place down abandoned mineshafts. Four shafts are present on site, two of which could not be located… No effective air sampling has been completed… methods of soil sampling used are unreliable…" Far from being "absent", Atkins concluded, "asbestos dumping in the north of the site could be up to 4.5 metres thick". The report said there were probably other carcinogens on the site that had simply not been investigated.

This all diverges significantly from the claims made by the developer in its planning application. As the *Eye* reported at the time, not only was asbestos contamination in the Spodden Valley visible to the naked eye, but reports completed in the 1990s had confirmed that asbestos was dumped in the area. Countryside, Britain's "leading brownfield developer", had omitted to mention them in its planning application.

Countryside has issued a statement saying it "welcomes" the work undertaken by Atkins; it will "help us to move forward". Rochdale MP Paul Rowen, meanwhile, said: "*Private Eye* has continued its tradition of asking the questions and reporting the stories that others wouldn't ask."

But one question remains: why have taxpayers in Rochdale had to pay £80,000 to show that a planning application, filed at a cost of £5,500, was nonsense? The *Eye* has said so all along… and it costs just £1.40!

CHURCH LAND SALES

Chapter and worse

AT LAST some moral guidance from the Church of England. Last month flying was deemed a sin, and in June Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, declared: "There is now an overriding imperative to walk more lightly upon the earth."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, followed suit, telling his flock: "We make choices of moral significance and our relation to the environment is no exception."

The Primate of All England did not explain, however, how the church's decision to sell acres of green fields in the north-east for the development of a vast industrial complex would aid this endeavour.

The 205-hectare site at Fellgate, near South Shields, has been owned by chapter of Durham Cathedral and the Church Commissioners for hundreds of years. And though locals have organised a 2,000-signature petition against the proposal, the commissioners seem pretty chipper about the idea of flogging it.

"Yes, we are in favour of the development," they have said. "We cannot deny that we will be the beneficiaries of any sale of the land. We acknowledge the opposition of local residents but this is a choice between green fields and employment opportunities."

It is, no doubt, a Christian duty to support regeneration in deprived areas, but there are at the moment no promises of jobs at the site. The idea of the business park comes from the local authority, South Tyneside metropolitan borough council, with the backing of the regional development agency, One North East. No private company has expressed any interest in the site or is looking for employees. So the exact nature of any "opportunities" remains unclear.

No matter, the church has confirmed to the *Eye* that if the authority firms up the scheme, it will be happy to make a fat pile of cash out of it.

Number crunching

£14m ■ Loans given secretly to Labour to fight last election campaign, which may now not be paid back

£6.5m ■ Loan given by Labour government to MG Rover to delay its collapse until after election, which will now definitely not be paid back

NHS plc: Case notes

1. THE TREATMENT CENTRE

HOW right we were to report that the new wave of super diagnostic and treatment centres were but a further tier of healthcare that would enable the private sector to refer NHS patients straight to itself (see *Eyes* 1163, 1162).

According to the *Health Services Journal*, South African-owned Netcare was favoured to win the £30m-a-year contract to run the new integrated clinical assessment and treatment services (ICATS) in Greater Manchester. Netcare, of course, already runs its very own surgical centre, which could no doubt pick up a lot of the referrals for general surgery, ear, nose and throat work and gynaecology from itself.

(Netcare's Greater Manchester Surgical Centre – like many other private centres – has already done rather well out of the NHS with the 14 primary care trusts in the area having to fork out £1.9m for 6,000 operations, when only 4,000 were carried out.)

However, health department officials, once alerted to the thorny problem of Netcare's obvious conflict of interest, have apparently decided that the lucrative contract could be split with another company, Partnership Health Group. So Netcare can cherry pick patients and divide the profits neatly between itself and Partnership. Brilliant!

2. THE MERGER

EYE readers will not have been too surprised to learn that appalling hygiene and a virulent stomach bug, Clostridium difficile, contributed to the deaths of 65 patients and the infection of 334 others over three years at Stoke Mandeville hospital.

Nor will they have been unduly surprised to learn that, three weeks before the Health Commission published its devastating report, Ruth Harrison, the chief executive of the South Bucks Hospitals Trust, announced that she was to step down "to pursue academic interests and spend more time with her family".

When Harrison got the job in 2003, with a brief to oversee the merger of Stoke Mandeville and South Buckinghamshire NHS trusts, M.D. noted what an odd appointment it was. Harrison, as chief executive of the Worcester acute hospitals trust, had just overseen one of the UK's most acrimonious health mergers, which resulted in the new PFI trust being plunged into the red and her enduring several calls for her resignation and two votes of no-confidence from her own consultants.

As M.D. wrote at the time: "Our sincerest condolences go to South Bucks."

In the City

IF THE NatWest Three really believe that their former employer – now owned by Royal Bank of Scotland – could ride to their rescue in Texas, they may have been encouraged by the ruling that let rival Barclays out of the Enron shareholders' civil action. RBS remains a defendant in the same class action which is due to go to trial in the same federal court in Houston where the three former bankers face charges of defrauding NatWest in an Enron-linked deal.

Federal judge Melinda Harmon threw out the case against Barclays on the grounds that the British bank had merely aided and abetted Enron to disguise and manipulate its numbers using the wonderfully named offshore special purpose vehicle Chewco to hide debt. That was not sufficient to support a civil claim for securities fraud. The ruling is expected to be appealed by the Enron shareholders, who have already collected more than £3.5bn in settlements from Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase and Canadian Imperial Bank.

"Could I borrow some gas?"

The Harmon ruling came the day before David Bermingham, Giles Darby and Gary Mulgrew were refused permission to be bailed back to the UK – an unsurprising decision given their two-year fight against extradition. They remain on bail and face a possible trial as early as next month on charges of ripping off $7.3m from NatWest just as it was being acquired by RBS in early 2000. The money came from a deal by which the bank sold its stake in another Enron-linked offshore entity for a fraction of the money pocketed by its partner Credit Suisse First Boston, Enron insiders and the three bankers.

They have always claimed that NatWest/RBS approved the deal. The bank has declined to confirm their version of events, instead declaring unhelpfully that it reserved all its rights against the trio. However, it has never taken any action to recover the money. One explanation for this curious inaction has been the litigation RBS faced over Enron. One action was settled last year with the bankrupt company. However, the shareholders' action remained in play. RBS must now be hoping after the Barclays ruling that it too could escape the need to go ahead with a reported $100m settlement.

Despite the 2005 settlement, RBS has always denied any wrongdoing and insisted it had a "very limited role". Enron itself generously described the RBS role after the settlement as "modest" relative to others.

If peace breaks out, no doubt the NatWest Three and their allies will step up their campaign to have RBS come to their aid and confirm approval of the deal which gave NatWest $1m and their former executives $7.3m for a $250,000 investment.

But would RBS be so keen to side with the trio and publicly declared their "innocence" over such a one-sided deal that even Bermingham has admitted looked "horrible" on the facts? One reason the answer could be "no" might be that the deal was approved without any of those "horrible" facts, such as the personal benefit to be made by the bank's employees, being known to RBS. Certainly Enron was not aware of the true nature of the deal, which it funded with $30m.

Another reason could be the history of NatWest/RBS's long, close and profitable "modest" relationship with Enron and the orchestrators of the fraud. That history was detailed over 100 pages in 2003 by Neal Batson, the court-appointed examiner in Enron's Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection proceedings. Those details doubtless encouraged RBS to settle last year in a deal whereby it wrote off $329m in claims against Enron in return for just $20m and paid the company $42m. RBS had initially claimed to be owed $537m.

The Batson report is based on a mass of internal NatWest/RBS emails and memos, plus sworn statements from bank executives. These show that the NatWest Three were not alone in their love of energy trader Enron and the big fees it generated. They also show just how much NatWest officials knew or suspected of the way in which Enron was hiding debt and fixing its quarterly earnings numbers. Although the NatWest Three crop up in the report, so do many other more senior NatWest/RBS suits, including two directors.

The "very limited" NatWest relationship with Enron went back to at least 1990. By 1995 NatWest boasted it was "Enron's lead international bank". There had been 15 meetings in the previous four years between top executives and Enron. By then the bank had already earned $23m from Enron. NatWest proudly declared: "Our strong ties extend to the chairman" – the late and unlamented convicted fraudster Ken Lay. Two top NatWest bankers met Lay in 1992 to discuss further development of the relationship. Three bank executives met with chief executive Jeff Skilling in 1995 – Skilling faces more than 20 years in jail when sentenced later this year. Chief financial officer Andrew Fastow and his lieutenant Michael Kopper were in regular contact. Both are bound for prison.

RBS was not so close as NatWest but still participated in 14 deals between 1997 and 1999. Between 1997 and 2001 the banks did 53 Enron deals. In late 2000, a year before the crash, RBS slavered that the "future opportunities with Enron appear endless". The two banks had earned $31m from Enron in 1999 and this figure was expected to be exceeded in 2000. Batson estimated that the combined NatWest/RBS average return on Enron deals was 110 percent.

The report estimated that NatWest had invested $7.5m in the LJM1 partnership which features in the criminal case and received back a $23m profit in two years. RBS estimated that it had made a 1,200 percent return on its investment in LJM1 even allowing for the mere $1m it was paid for the part of the operation which was so profitable to the NatWest Three. Between 1994 and 2001 NatWest/RBS was estimated to have earned at least $83m from Enron.

The Batson report focused on six transactions, including LJM1, between 1999 and 2001. Four of these were accounting-driven transactions involving Enron's UK power station interests, which relied heavily on undisclosed side agreements to ensure RBS was repaid. This was essential because the income was insufficient to pay interest and repay the loans. But if the secret guarantees were disclosed, then Enron could not book any profit from the supposed sale of these assets to RBS-linked entities.

These six deals, Batson says, allowed Enron to generate $95m in income from LJM1 alone in 1999 (more than 10 percent of total net income), record another $191m of income from sales of assets which should not have been so recorded, characterize $444m of loan proceeds as cash flow and understate debt by $450m in 1999 and 2000. The LJM1 deal also enabled Fastow and Kopper to share $40m with other Enron insiders. Fastow and Kopper in turn enriched the NatWest Three and will now testify against them.

Batson accused NatWest of participating in a non-economic hedging transaction from which Enron could only lose in order to extract a profit from LJM1, and entering into deals which Enron had to keep from its auditors resulting in misleading financial presentations. RBS itself described these techniques as "21st century alchemy" at a 2000 credit committee meeting. The credit application for one of the deals admitted, regarding Enron's assurances that RBS would face no loss, that "they cannot be formally documented for accounting reasons". It was accepted RBS was facilitating "financial engineering".

A circular transaction supposedly involving oil trading and codenamed "Nixon" involved RBS lending Enron $110m in order to boost its March 2000 figures. This was described internally by RBS as "effectively a window dressing request" and a "synthetic loan". It was approved to "once again uptier the Enron relationship by assisting them over their crucial de-leveraging periods of quarter and year-end". In other words, fake the figures. Barclays also participated in the deal with Citigroup.

When Enron wanted the three-month "Nixon" loan extended by a month, this was done because of the big fees available, despite RBS officials stating: "Credit concern again centred on the extent of Enron's manipulation." These loans were booked as cash flow by Enron, which crashed when it was finally realized that most of its profits were virtual, not real, and there was insufficient cash in the company.

Initially Enron's request was rejected but "following intense pressure on relationship grounds", the next day the extension was agreed by more senior RBS officials after Enron agreed to pay a minimum $40,000 fee and the deal was transformed into a credit derivative which reduced the risk.

A 1997 RBS report referred to Enron's "extensive use of off-balance sheet liabilities… to preserve its balance sheet". By September 2000 these had become "massive off-balance sheet liabilities". Their disclosure sank the company in what was then the biggest US bankruptcy.

Yet prior to the RBS takeover in 2000, NatWest's Enron exposure alone had breached its own "prudential limit" of $971m! Much of this related to Greenwich NatWest where Bermingham and friends worked. At the same time, an RBS official was expressing concern about the "things

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES, SIR JULIAN, THE DAYS ARE GONE WHEN WE'D THROW MONEY AT THE PROBLEM!
...NOW WE'RE GOING TO THROW IT AT YOU INSTEAD!

O·B·N

Lord Browne is in a different place. He is respected, if not revered, to such a degree that some investors reckon the oil giant [BP] cannot do without him.

Lord Browne is a first-class talent, able to think strategically at the same time as manage the effective execution of plans. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that he is nearing, let alone passing, his sell-by date. Although he is approaching his 60th birthday, investors could look forward with confidence if Lord Browne were to occupy the BP cockpit for another five, or even more, years.

ROBERT COLE
Times

Submitted by John Dog

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

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by Cyclops

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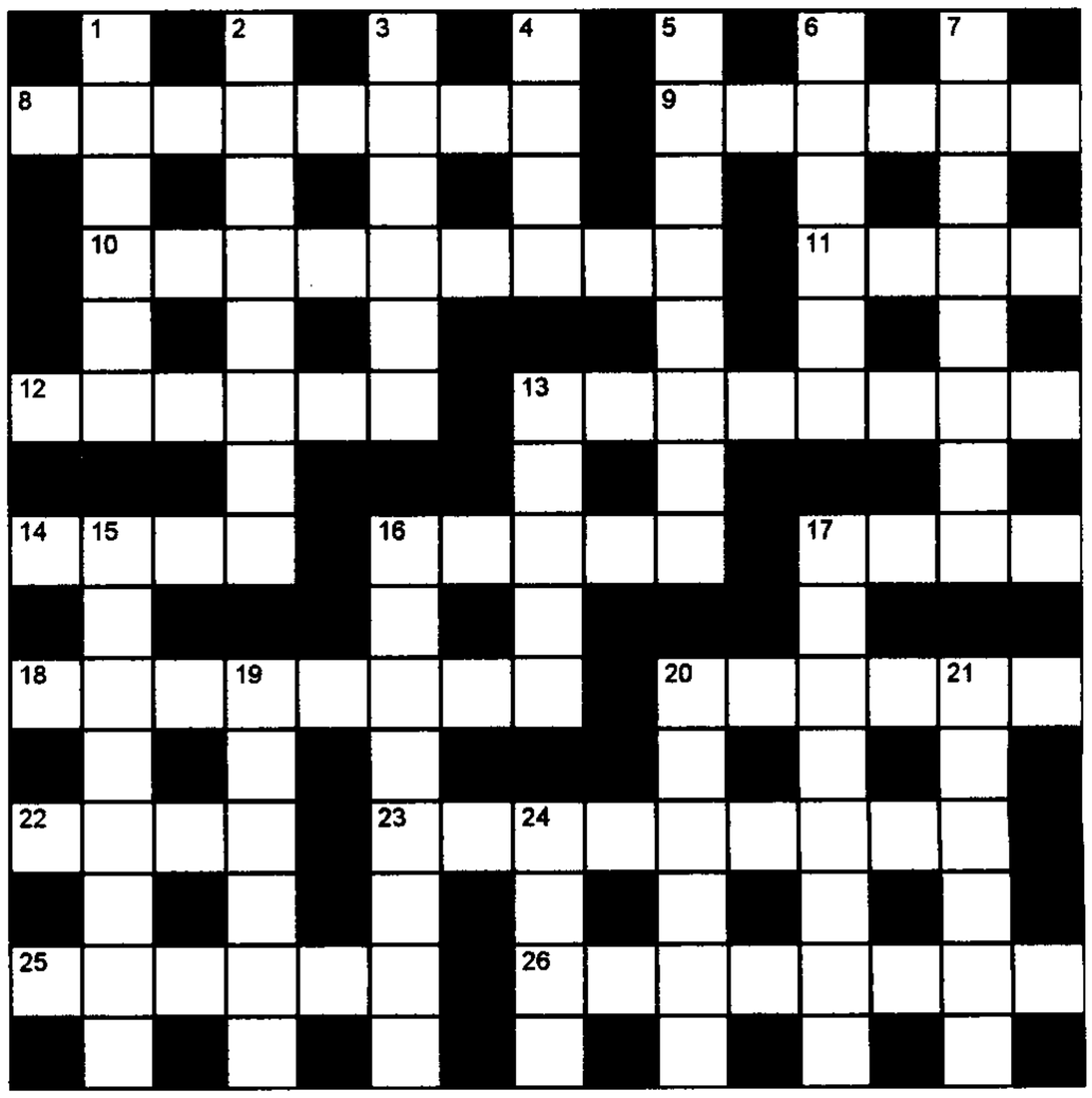


ACROSS

8 Blow delivered by hand to leader (4,4)

9 Despicable type, one of ten joining *Mirror*, say (6)

10/23 As new-style Dubya, reportedly carried away – "A reward? Bloody Hell, Hislop!" (4-5,9)

11 See 22ac.

12 Daring to get screwed, as men acquiring female habits (2,4)

13 Champ embraces rotten liar like the PM (8)

14/16ac./17ac. Unlikely to be topped as tabloid fodder for tossers? (4,5,4)

18 Leading film villain as a 14/16ac./17ac. might be described (3-5)

20 Article Brown originated spiked by Blair (look in the centre) – that's coolness for you! (6)

22/11 *Times* columnist augments *Spectator* circulation with "pussy" mostly (4-4)

23 See 10ac.

25 Nipper's reported condition (6)

26 Stupidly agree to put outside butt from Will Self duplicate (5,3)

DOWN

1 Well-endowed, soundly left-wing MP – a celebrated striker (3,3)

2 Drop behind a ball of fire (4-4)

3 Doctor getting erection grabbing dirty Anne in Malaysia (6)

4 Frigging aide's conceit (4)

5 Blair familiarly kept in check by a wise type? That era's long past (5,3)

6 Republic's weekend brief to Cyclops: drive home arse over tip (6)

7 Soprano on TV: "Dread being gobbled by Good Queen Bess" (8)

13 Lulu near to squeezing member (5)

15 Kinky way love grabs stud's end as an oath is uttered (8)

16 The one mentioned by Blair, i.e. lacking as a has-been PM (8)

17 South American invader, real git moving to Italy's capital (8)

19 Don't let the public know when Hewitt understandably starts to push off (4,2)

20 Gang prat around – for all they're worth? (6)

21 To be a boss one must get in a poxy state (6)

24 Stuff put around end of arse to make hole bigger (4)

Crossword 318 winner: JEFF LADD

ACROSS: 9 Allende 10 Heiress 11 Geese 12 Tombstone 13/19 The Royal Family 15 Eyelet 17 Short and curlies 21 Pudendum 23 Crossword 25 Locum 26 Respect 27 Entente.

DOWN: 1 Faggot 2 Alter ego 3 Anne 4 Restraint 5 Chum 6 Kiss my arse 7 Recoil 8 Asbestos 14 Outclassed 16 Scoundrel 17 Soft-core 18 Indecent 20 Maoist 22 Member 24 Oats 25 Late.

that (Enron is) doing to massage their balance sheet". Another wrote of the "absolute level of manipulation undertaken by Enron in its operations and the preparation of its financial statements". A credit manager declared: "The scale of financial period manipulation is exceedingly worrying and I don't yet understand it nor am I sure that anyone in the bank does… the question is when do we stop?" The answer was they didn't.

According to Batson, in order to secure its profit from LJM1, RBS entered into an Enron share swap deal with insurance group AIG (new sponsors of Manchester United) which "circumvented" the partnership agreement, "contravened" representations made by Fastow to the Enron board and "facilitated increased distributions to Fastow and other insiders".

Even Bermingham initially expressed concern about the original LJM1 deal because of the clear conflict of interest involving Fastow who ran the partnership. Bank auditor KPMG also warned about potential reputational risk. But the deal went ahead anyway. "Our challenge now is to lock in and extract value from this trade," Bermingham wrote in an email. This was achieved in November 1999 through the swap deal with AIG. This enabled RBS to book $67m of income. Batson said there was no evidence that RBS sought confirmation that Enron approved of this deal – it had not.

In three transactions involving Enron's Teesside assets RBS put up more than $280m on Fastow's assurance that they would be taken out whole! Fastow in turn was able to boost Enron's numbers by more than $120m. Again RBS insiders were raising questions. "There is clearly a need to get behind the accounting issues here to check out Enron's story," wrote one official in a 2001 email. "This appears to be a step too far in my view". "Not sure I am happy with this," wrote a director.

RBS was unable to provide any evidence that it had alerted Enron's auditor Arthur Andersen to the crucial verbal side agreements given by Fastow.

Given this history it is no surprise that RBS has settled one case with Enron and will no doubt settle the other unless the Barclays ruling intervenes. And it will perhaps not relish the idea of officials testifying for the NatWest Three against Fastow and Kopper – men who made RBS as well as themselves and the three British bankers very rich.

'Slicker'

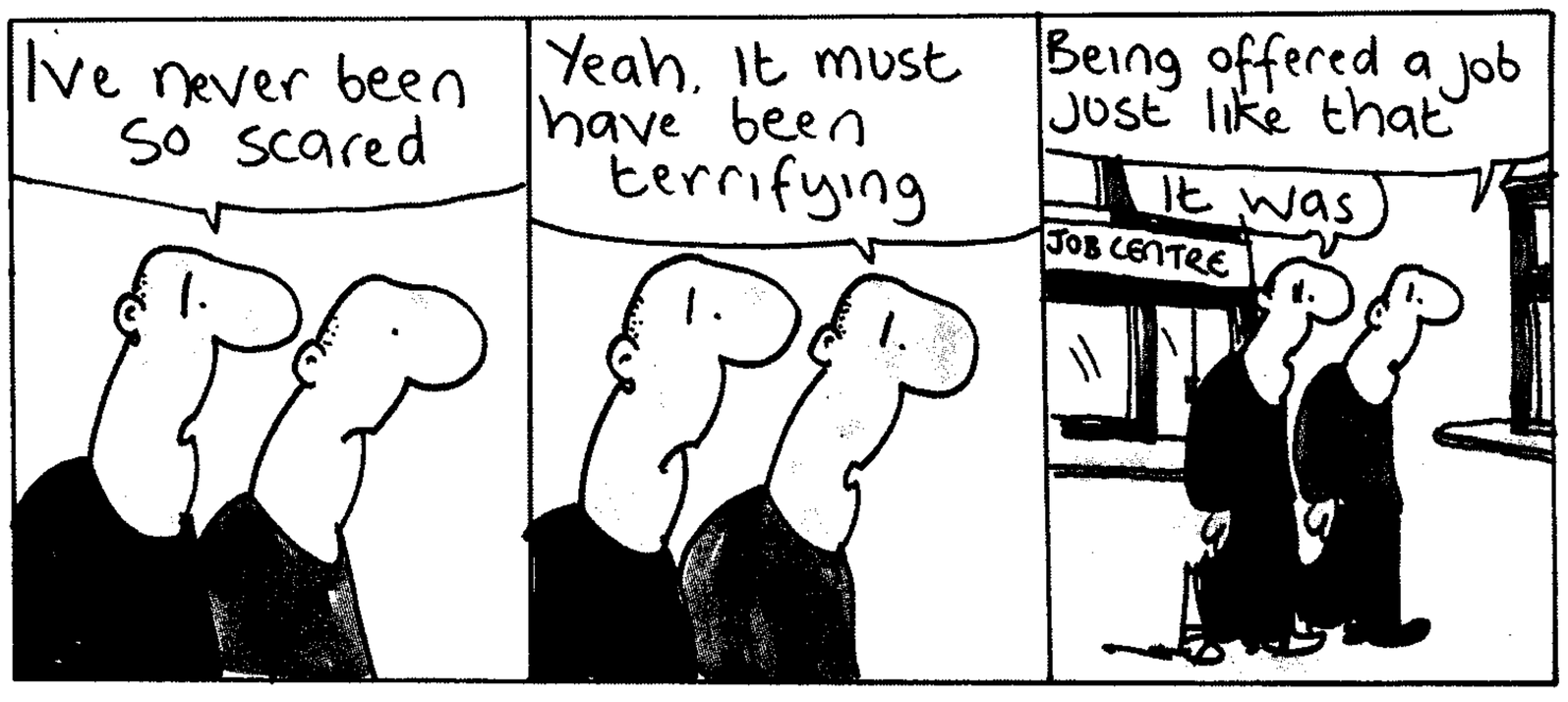
Toilet trouble

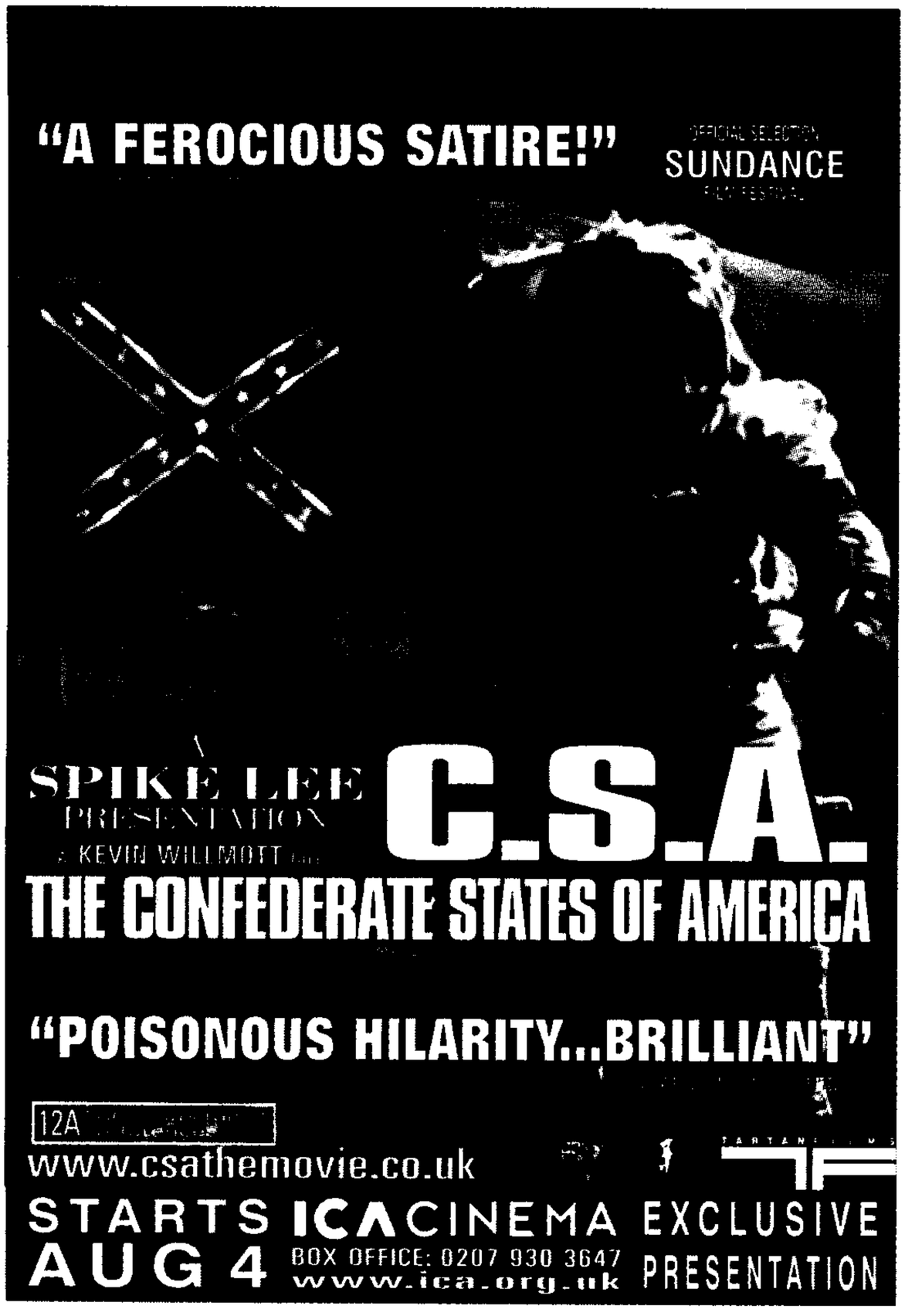
COUNCILLORS in Langport have pooh-poohed a revamp of the town's public toilets.

Western Gazette

YOBS

HUSBAND





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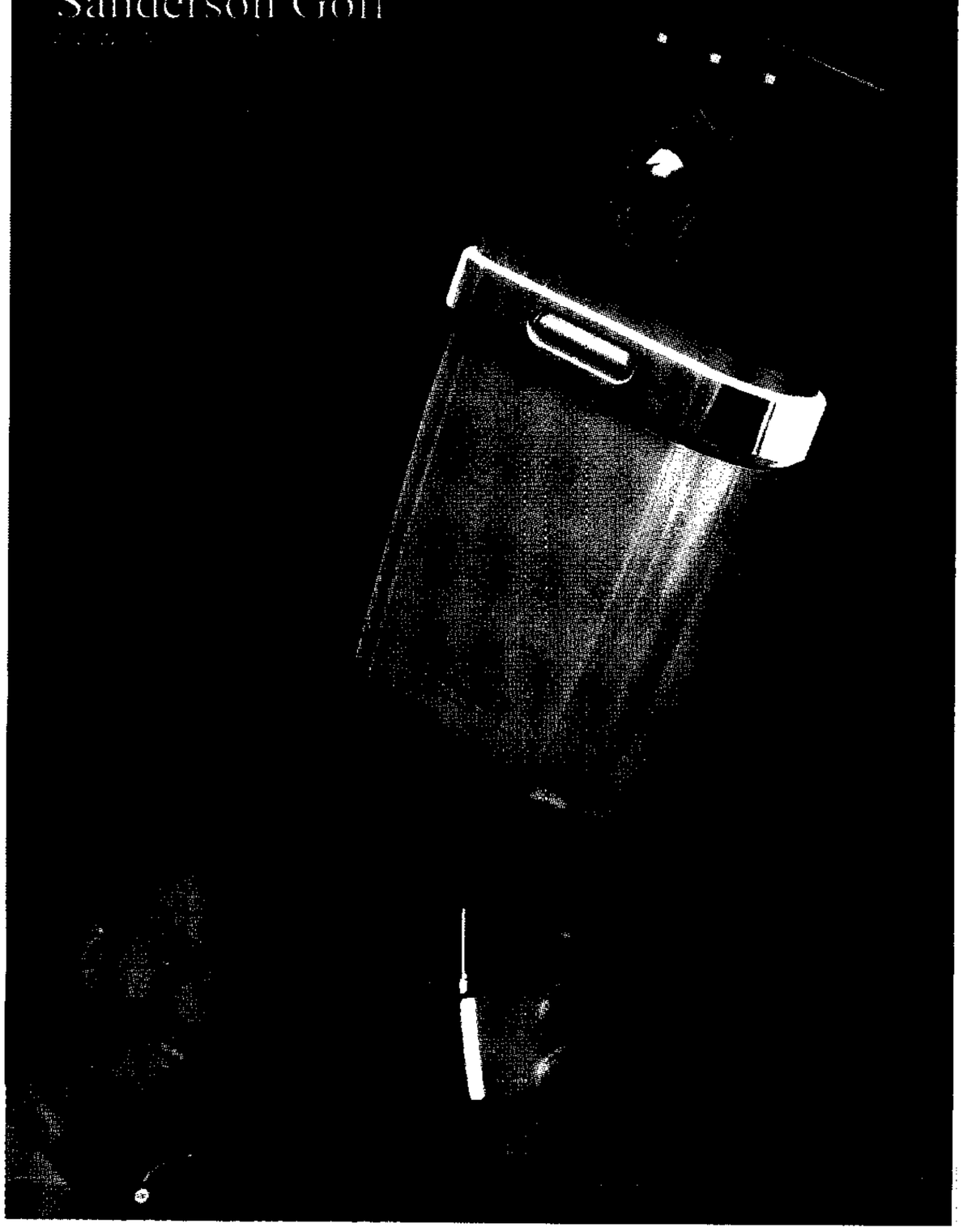

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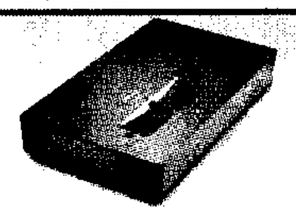

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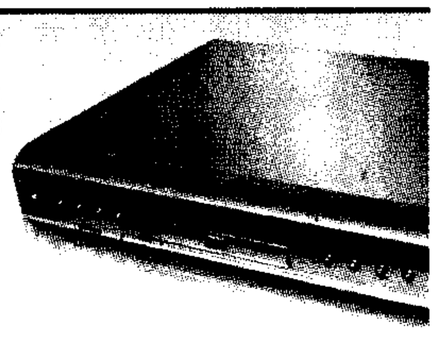

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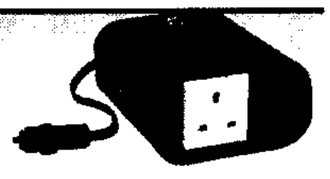

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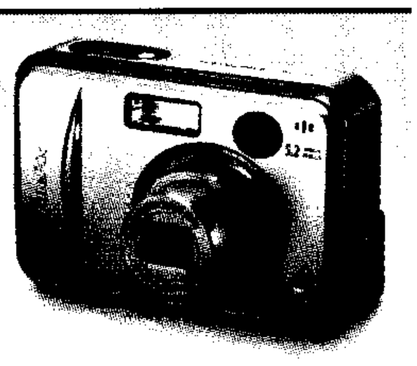

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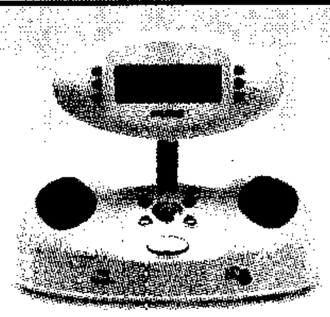

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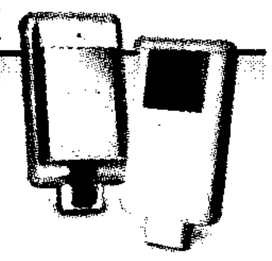

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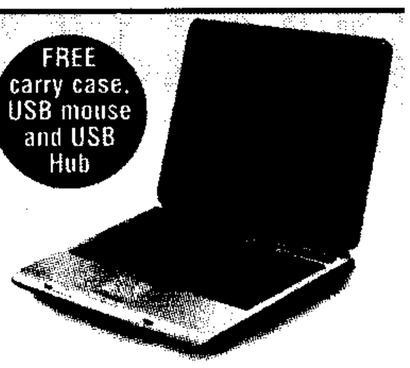

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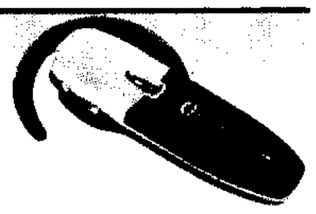

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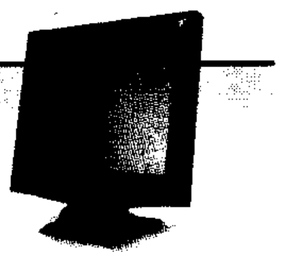

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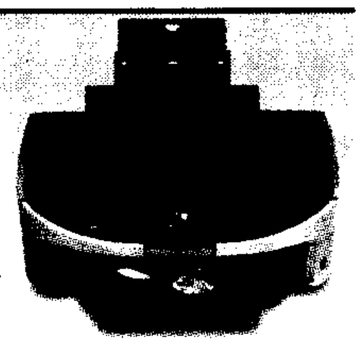

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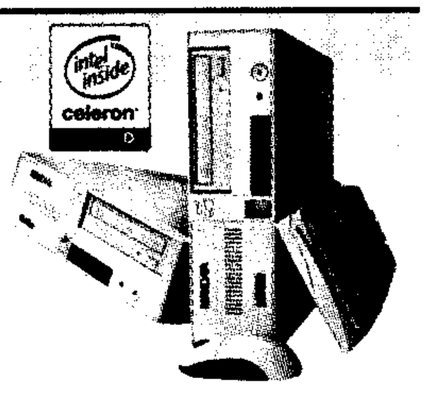

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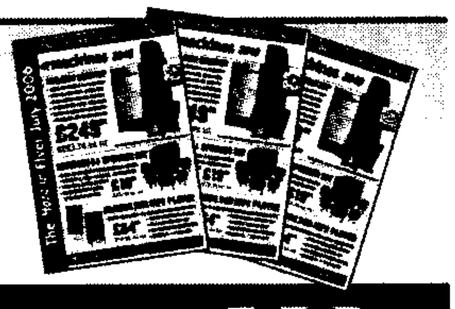

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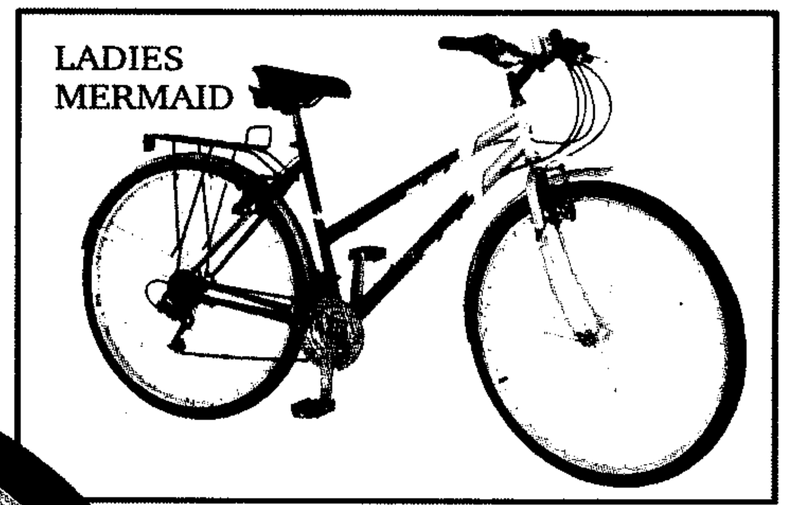

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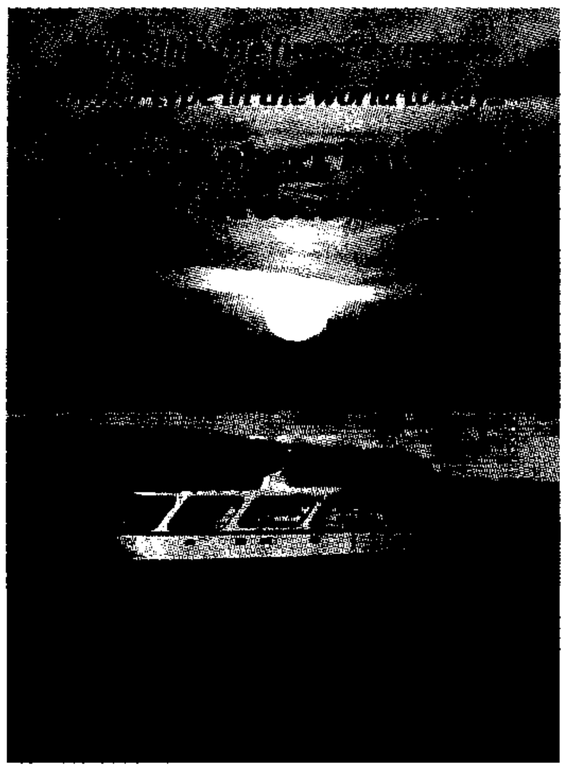

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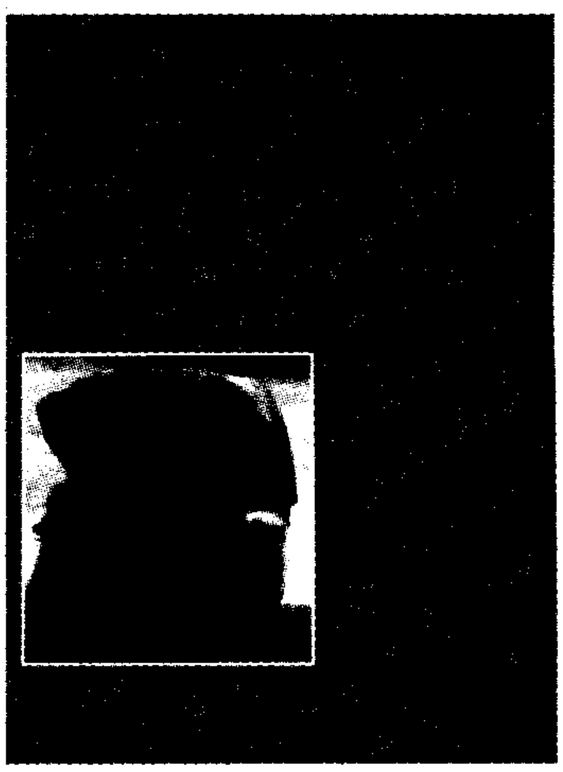

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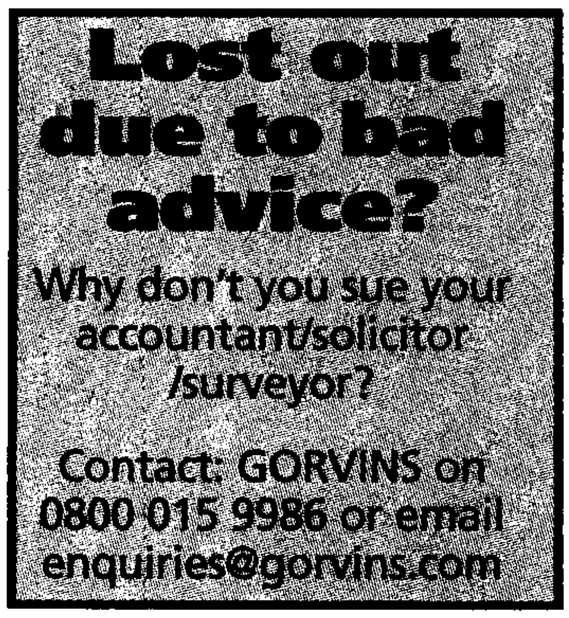
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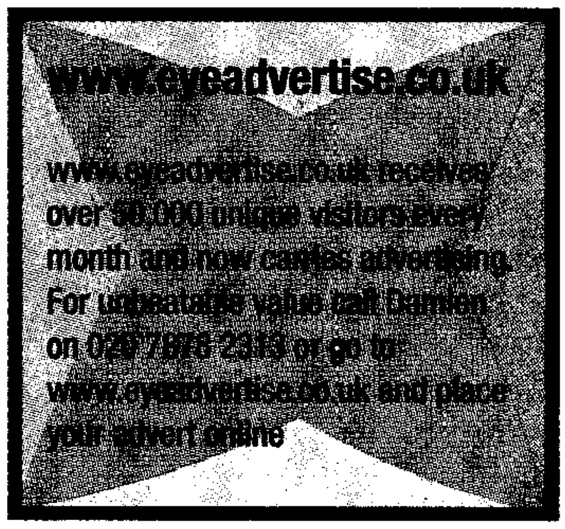
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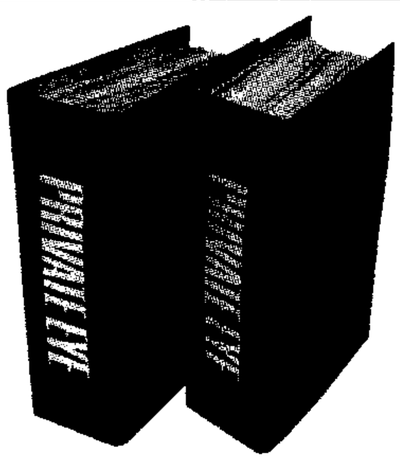

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